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Voices From Home: Familial Bonds in the Works of Horton Foote (1916-).

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VOICES FROM HOME: FAMILIAL BONDS IN THE WORKS OF HORTON FOOTE (1916-)

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

		page
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS		iii
ABSTRACT		v
INTRODUCTION		1
CHAPTER		
1	FOOTE'S FAMILY HERITAGE	8
2	BECOMING A WRITER	76
3	WRITING FOR TELEVISION	134
4	FOOTE AND FILM	190
5	THEMES AND VARIATIONS: THE LATE PLAYS OF HORTON FOOTE	264
CONCLUSION		301
WORKS CITED		305
VITA		313

ABSTRACT

For more than half a century Horton Foote has been regarded as one of America's foremost dramatists. Born and reared in Wharton, Texas, he wrote his first play Wharton Dance in 1939, at the age of twenty-three, and gained his first Broadway production, Only The Heart, in 1944. His success as a playwright led to television, for which he wrote some of his finest dramas, and finally to a distinguished career in film. Foote has received numerous awards for his plays and screenplays, including Academy Awards for To Kill A Mockingbird (1962) and Tender Mercies (1983) and an Academy Award nomination for The Trip to Bountiful (1985).

Foote's compassionate depiction of small town family relationships is his unique terrain. Virtually every play he has written has been about the rural Texas of his youth. Most of his dramas have been based on familial stories or childhood experiences, revealing the writer's obsessive need to dramatize the life struggles of his own family during the early years of the twentieth century. His works focus upon families in transition and upon individual resilience in the face of conflict and tragedy. Throughout his writings Foote weaves an intricate commentary on the nature of fate and the importance of family to personal responsibility and contentment.

Unquestionably, the subject of family is a significant part of Foote's fiction; yet it has been dealt with only incidentally by scholars. This study focuses on this otherwise neglected topic and explores the significance of family to the writer's artistic theory and practice. Through extensive research into Foote's familial background, interviews with the playwright himself, and close examination of more than sixty plays and screenplays, this study examines the forces which have shaped the writer's artistic vision.

INTRODUCTION

Horton Foote has been a distinctive writer of drama for television, film, and theatre since the appearance in 1940 of his play Wharton Dance. During the 1940s and early 1950s his full-length plays, Texas Town (1940), Out of My House (1941), Only The Heart (1942), The Chase (1952), and a number of one-act plays had successful Broadway or off-Broadway productions. Foote further established himself as one of America's most accomplished playwrights during the "Golden Age" of live television drama. From 1952 to 1960, he contributed twenty-eight adaptations and original works to the new media. Foote's adaptation of William Faulkner's Old Man (1960) was nominated for an Emmy Award, and his drama The Trip to Bountiful (1952) was the first teleplay to be included in the New York Museum of Art's film archives.

Foote has had equal success as a screenwriter. He won Academy Awards for his film adaptation of Harper Lee's To Kill a Mockingbird (1962) and his original screenplay Tender Mercies (1983). In 1972, he adapted William Faulkner's Tomorrow for the screen and in 1985 his movie version of The Trip to Bountiful was nominated for an Academy Award. During the same year, On Valentine's Day was selected as the official American entry for the Venice Film Festival. Since 1985, Foote has had numerous other plays performed on stages across America, and his films have been shown in theatres across the world.

Foote's record of achievement has been acknowledged by audiences and critics. Yet, for a large part of his creative life, Horton Foote has remained relatively obscure in American literature, perhaps in part because of his withdrawal from Broadway and Hollywood, during the 1960s. Foote became disillusioned with the changes taking place in American theatre and cinema. Traditional forms of drama were assaulted by an aesthetic revolution that insisted upon new modes and styles of expression. Realistic family plays became unmarketable, and after twenty-five years of writing for stage and screen, Foote withdrew from the public eye. Retiring to his New Hampshire farm, he spent ten years assessing his previous work and crafting a number of new plays in his own unique style, which eventually re-established Foote as one of America's most important playwrights and filmmakers.

By 1978, Foote returned to the stage to direct three plays from his newly written family chronicle, The Orphans' Home. In 1983, his film Tender Mercies was released. These works revived an interest in Foote's drama that has continued to grow. Since 1983, a number of his previously unpublished plays have been made available to readers; new plays and screenplays have continued to appear on stages and screens throughout the world. His work has found a large and growing audience. Despite Foote's achievements, only a

small core of critical materials exists. This study aims to add to this limited body of Foote scholarship.

Whether in television, film, or theatre, the distinguishing feature of Horton Foote's work is its focus on the family. Much of the playwright's unique power can be attributed to his sensitive understanding of the trials, suffering, and rewards of family life. Foote has always drawn from his own roots for artistic inspiration. Most of his plays evolved out of the familial stories and experiences of his childhood. They explore the life struggles of his own family in the small town of Wharton, Texas. Even in those works that originate from other sources, the writer's primary focus has been on the family, dramatizing the interplay of relationships as families experience private struggles, loss and misfortunes, joys and frustrations, and the disruption of an economically unstable society.

Family interaction in Foote's works often resembles a battlefield for individuals suffering familial oppression. Wives and mothers are mentally abused, husbands suffer madness, daughters flee from the tyranny of parents, and sons commit acts of crime because they are unable to live up to their father's expectations. Usually a parent is missing from the family, and Foote's protagonists are often orphans, rebellious daughters, or aging widows. At other times, Foote depicts the family as a sanctuary of love, protection,

and emotional security for his characters. This vision of the family as both oppressor and comforter suggests a common ground between Foote and other American playwrights such as Arthur Miller who have depicted the individual caught between familial loyalty and societal responsibility. Foote's concern extends beyond the familial unit into the realm of extended kinship and community relationships. The many relatives, friends, and neighbors in his plays may be the cause of disruption or the promise of hope; their existence in Foote's texts suggests a larger social fabric.

Family actions are always witnessed against the backdrop of a small Texas town, usually Harrison, as the community experiences the moral and social upheaval caused by a collapsing economy. The fall of a once vital plantation aristocracy, the rise of a new mercantile class dependent on the cotton crop, or the sudden emergence of an oil rich people provide subtexts for many of Foote's plays. The effects of these changes (poverty, greed, exploitation, and violence) threaten the entire community. But while Foote depicts a changing society's destructive effects on the family, he, also, perhaps with even greater emphasis, celebrates the regenerative power of familial bonds that enables one to overcome the many trials and tribulations in life.

Critical essays and reviews have responded to productions of Horton Foote's plays and films, and several

interviews with the writer have appeared in various journals and newspapers. But few full-length studies of Foote's works exist. David Yellin and Marie Connors' Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Horton Foote's Three Trips to Bountiful explore the transformation of a Foote play from one medium to another. The most comprehensive study of Foote's works, George Terry Barr's dissertation "The Ordinary World of Horton Foote" (1986), provides a general overview of Foote's socio-political and cultural contexts, and explicates specific themes in his canon. Barr believes that Foote's strength as a playwright lies in his ability to make heroes of ordinary, middle-class people who often must compromise their hopes and dreams to survive.

Terry Barr offers a general background of Foote's childhood and suggests that the writer's immediate family has influenced his work in three main ways: first, the writer's preoccupation with strong, sympathetic female characters results from Foote's admiration for his mother, grandmother, and wife; second, the abundance of fatherless families throughout his cannon stems from the limited time the young Horton spent with his hard-working father; and third, the prevalence of characters who sacrifice their own dreams to those of other family members reveals Foote's appreciation of sacrifices made by his parents on his behalf.

The following study provides a critical analysis of Horton Foote's plays while focusing on the significance of family to the writer's artistic theory and practice. It will attempt to answer the following questions: (1) What is Foote's family heritage, and what are the correlatives between this heritage and the writer's work? (2) What are the dominant patterns of plot represented in the plays, and what familial images do they reflect? (3) What are the characteristics of Foote's art that make it a uniquely regional and American voice? (4) Finally, from an historical perspective, how does Foote compare to other 20th century American dramatists?

Foote's plays provide the primary evidence for my study. The study begins with an introduction to Horton Foote's familial heritage in order to gain a better understanding of its influence on his writing. No comprehensive biography or autobiography exists on Foote; my discussion draws upon information about the playwright's family and childhood obtained from documents and letters and from interviews with friends, relatives, and Foote himself. Chapter II traces Foote's early career in the theatre, his emergence as a playwright, and the connections between his family experiences and early writings. Chapter III treats the writer's pioneering contributions to the "Golden Age" of television drama, the ways in which the medium of television influenced his work, and Foote's evolving vision of family

life as expressed in his teleplays. Chapter IV provides an overview of Foote's career in cinema and his translation of family stories into film. Chapter V notes Foote's most recent works for the stage and explores the evolution of his later plays. The concluding chapter provides a critical appraisal of his work, and explicates the significance of family to his writings and Foote's contributions to American drama.

Because he has been sensitive to American family life for almost half a century and because he has crafted plays that capture the strength and resilience of the human spirit, Horton Foote deserves a special place in American literature. Hopefully, through this study readers will better appreciate the playwright and his works and can join others who have been moved by his familiar voices from home.

CHAPTER 1
FOOTE'S FAMILY HERITAGE

> [The past lives in] that book of books . . . that collection transmitted orally from father to son of proverbs and prophesies, legends, laws, traditions of the origins and tales of the wanderings of his own tribe. For it is this . . . feeling of identity with his dead which characterizes and explains the Southerner. In his time he is priest of the tribal scripture, to forget any part would be sacrilege. He treasures the sayings of his kin . . . If he forgets them, he will be forgotten. If he remembers, he will be remembered, will take the place reserved and predestined for him in the company of his kin, in the realm of myth, outside of time. (Humphrey 36-38)

Whatever journeys they may take, American dramatists are at their best when they return home. This is especially true for Horton Foote, who has created an impressive body of plays and screenplays by tracing his familial roots back to their beginnings in the small, Southern town of Wharton, Texas. Because kinship and place are essential measures of meaning for Foote, this chapter will explore the playwright's family background to discover how his heritage and childhood experiences influenced his art and helped to shape a view of life that he has sought to convey throughout his career.

Albert Horton Foote, Jr., was born on March 14, 1916, in Wharton, Texas, a small town in the river-bottom country of Gulf Coast Texas that marks the western edge of the American South. The first-born son of Albert Horton Foote, Sr., and Harriet Gautier (Brooks) Foote, he was descended from several of the oldest and best-known families of Texas.

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His maternal ancestors, Peter William and Elizabeth Gautier, immigrated to America from Bristol, England, in October 1784. They landed on the shores of North Carolina and then traveled inland to the small community of Wilmington, where the couple built a prosperous cotton plantation and reared a family. Here they lived until the 1830s when the lure of a new land, abundant in fertile soil and free from burdening taxes, was so appealing that they joined impresario Stephen F. Austin to conquer the unredeemed wilderness of Texas. Traveling by horse and wagon, the Gautiers spanned the watersheds of the Colorado and Brazos rivers, coming to rest near the small town of Columbia in Brazoria County. There they began to homestead and soon emerged as one of the region's most prominent landowning families. Peter Gautier, Sr., died in 1842; thereafter, business and familial responsibilities were assumed by his eldest son, Peter Gautier, Jr. Peter married Lucy Anne Holmes on January 12, 1825, and through their perseverance and industry the family prospered. As Peter turned the virgin prairie and massive canebrakes into rolling farmland, Lucy gave birth to two daughters, Harriet Elizabeth and Josephine Gautier.

In 1850, Harriet Elizabetn married Columbia's most successful merchant, John William Brooks. John was the son

of Captain William Brooks, a well-known merchant seaman from Virginia. The Brooks' forbearers had a similar ancestry to the Gautiers. Of English "planter" stock, they immigrated to America in the 1600s from Gloucester, England, where they had been affluent merchants, doctors, and lawyers. Settling along the banks of the Chesapeake Bay in the tiny county of Gloucester, Virginia, the family practiced their professions and for generations lived in old-fashioned Virginia refinement.

Into this world of Southern hospitality and privilege, Horton Foote's great-grandfather John Brooks was born at his family's plantation home of Bay View. John's father was quite prosperous, having amassed a fortune in the shipping industry and securing for his family a healthy estate. Unfortunately, he died a young man, leaving his wife Anne widowed and his children fatherless. Without sufficient leadership, the family fell into a state of chaos and would have remained so had it not been for the charity of Captain William's brother John Foster Brooks. John Foster took responsibility for tending the estate and caring for his brother's offspring. Under his guidance, the children overcame the loss of their father and acquired a strong moral and educational upbringing, which was later reflected in their resilient personalities. John Foster's sacrifice and familial loyalty were never forgotten by his descendants. As other family members faced the inevitable

hardships of early life in America, the memory of his love provided a "model" for their own actions (Womack interview, 9 Nov. 1988).

In the mid-1840s John and his bother Thomas left Virginia for Texas. By 1850, Tom was Brazoria County's most respected physician; and John had become reasonably wealthy through his expanding mercantile business. Their achievements were in no way accidental; they had, after all, descended from a long line of shrewd businessmen and revered community leaders who stressed the importance of education and hard work. The brothers' success continued until the Civil War threatened the welfare of their family.

So much has been written concerning the destruction of the Civil War that one need not look to history books to show its effect upon American family life. It is enough to state that few people passed through the 1860s untouched by the fierce passions of sectional strife and bloodshed that accompanied this turbulent era. Texas did not suffer the kind of physical devastation inflicted on other Confederate states; and in this respect, John Brooks and his immediate family were spared much tragedy. When the war began, Brooks was a prominent citizen of Columbia, and both he and his wife Harriet were devoted civic and family leaders. In their impressive home on the banks of the Brazos River, the couple lived comfortably and carried on the "traditions of their forefathers" (Womack interview, 9 Nov. 1988). But

while the Brooks were reaping the harvests of prosperity, family members back in Virginia were experiencing the effects of the war.

John and Thomas' sisters, Anne and Laura, had married distinguished brothers, Sands and Thomas Smith. For a century or more, the Smiths had resided in comparative affluence on the shores of the Chesapeake Bay. These two large families owned adjoining plantations within a half mile of each other. Thomas Smith farmed Willow Grove, the old family homestead, and his brother Sands lived at Beachland, an ancient residence given to him by his father. Both were seats of aristocratic hospitality. Family members were known throughout the region for their "high character, gentleness, and kindness to the poor," and the brothers' affection and respect for each other were equally admired. According to the family legend, Thomas and Sands saw each other every day, and if not elsewhere, then at "the fence line 'ere the day ended." (Womack interview, 9 Nov. 1988). On October 6, 1863, this tranquil world was brutally disrupted when a regiment of Union cavalry mutilated and killed Sands Smith. Laura Smith's written account of the episode, "A Sad Incident of the Civil War," depicts the violence of the murder and its effects on the Smith family. The story reveals that Sands, having unknowingly angered several Union officers, was hanged from the limb of a persimmon tree and repeatedly stabbed with bayonets. Even

after he was dead, the soldiers continued to riddle his body with gunshots.

Thomas was forced to witness with grief and horror the murder of his only brother, and his pleas for compassion fell on deaf ears. When the deed had been completed, the soldiers threw Sands' mangled corpse into a ditch at the foot of the tree and escorted Thomas to prison where he remained for many months. When he was finally released, Thomas was a changed person. The scenes he had passed through overwhelmed him and destroyed his spirit. He gradually "weakened into helplessness and died an old man, on whom passing things made no impression" (4).

The tragic affair of Sands and Thomas Smith left their families broken and in a state of utter turmoil. The deaths had so ravaged the families' economic foundation that prospects for their children's future seemed non-existent; and despite the efforts of Anne and Laura, the plantations soon withered into uselessness. In their confusion, the Smiths turned to John Brooks for help. In 1866, he returned to his native home of Virginia to support the family in whatever way he could. John's solution to the problem was quite clear; the children would return with him to Texas where he and Harriet would educate and nourish them (Womack interview, Nov. 9, 1988). Thus, John William Brooks, like his uncle John Foster, stoically assumed the role of father to a group of fatherless children. Through his efforts,

they eventually matured into respectable adults and successful businessmen.

Brooks' sacrifice was extraordinary for the times since the nine years that followed the Civil War brought enormous hardships to him and his family. Although Texas had escaped the fierceness of battle, Reconstruction proved to be an economically unstable and morally turbulent period. The war had ruined many wealthy plantation owners and changed the lives of smaller landholders and merchants throughout the South. While a new system of labor and land management acceptable to both blacks and whites was evolving, thousands of acres of rich Texas soil lay idle; and the value of cotton fell to an all time low. Merchants, like John Brooks, who had depended so heavily on the cotton trade were suddenly and unexpectedly thrust into bankruptcy. Because of the "devaluation of Confederate money," much of Brooks' monetary assets proved to be utterly worthless; and his family was forced to start afresh (Womack interview, 9 Nov. 1988). However, before they could rebound from this financial setback, John Brooks died on October 4, 1870, leaving his wife and five children alone and virtually penniless. In a letter written on October 7 of that year, Laura Smith, a niece of John and Harriet Brooks, vividly details Mrs. Brooks' final moments with her dying husband:

> The Drs. told his wife that if she wished to talk with him that she better do so. . . . The scene was very affecting. His wife said, "Mr. Brooks, you have been mighty good to me, we have been married

> near twenty years and have never had a quarrel, it was your goodness, not mine. She told him that he would have five of their children with him and she would have five with her . . . that she would try to bring their boys up to be just such men as he was. . . . His poor wife stricken with grief, for a time she could not cry and I feared that she would go deranged. At times she looked so and would then calm herself and go back in the room and hang over uncle John, she would not leave him to sleep, but thank God, at last tears came to her relief, and she now weeps in silence. . . . Mrs. Brooks carried their baby to uncle John, and said Mr. Brooks our little baby has never been named. I want you to name it, what shall it be called, he said call her Laura, a name the boys had given her from birth. She was baptized by his corpse. ("Letter to Nancy Smith" 7 Oct. 1870)

Harriet Brooks proved to be a strong matriarchal figure who kept her family together after the loss of her man. She was part of a tradition of capable frontier women who possessed enormous courage, strength, and dignity--traits that best characterize Horton Foote's maternal ancestors. Mrs. Brooks molded her children (Billy, Peter, Tom, Nan, and Laura) in the image of her husband and instilled in them a deep respect for their familial heritage. Like their father, they worked hard at an early age to support the family. While the girls sewed the clothes, preserved the food, decorated the home, and nursed the sick, the boys tended the farm and clerked in stores.

Horton Foote's grandfather Tom Brooks was born on May 10, 1865. Tom's father died when he was only five; but through his mother's firm guidance, he acquired many of his father's fine traits. Relatives remember that he possessed a brilliant mathematical mind and that he was morally steady

and consistent. He was especially concerned for the "welfare of his family," was always ready to "help the less fortunate"; and as his life progressed, he became a rich and respected community leader (Outlar interview, 8 Nov. 1988).

At the age of eighteen, Tom Brooks left Columbia to attend Texas A&M University, where he later graduated with academic honors. He then moved to the rural community of Wharton, Texas, in 1886 to work for his cousins John and Travis Smith in the merchandising business. While serving as a clerk for the firm (which would later become his), Tom met and fell in love with a young secretary, Daisy Phelps Speed.

Daisy Speed was one of ten children born to John and Virginia Yerby Speed, who had come to Texas in the 1840s to manage a plantation in Columbia. Virtually self-educated, Daisy was a remarkably intelligent woman. As a young lady, she had been a governess on a large plantation; and in 1884, she became the first secretary to be employed in Wharton as well as the first to use a typewriter in the county courthouse. Miss Daisy was "a fierce aristocrat with an enormous sense of family pride and a capacity for deep, unfaltering devotion to those she loved" (Foote interview, 18 Nov. 1988). Although her diminutive stature reflected softness, kindness, and gentility, to those who knew her, Daisy Brooks was a Southern belle with a backbone of steel and a mind of mercury.

Tom Brooks and Daisy Speed were married on January 11, 1893, and to this union were born eight children. Two daughters, Jennie and Daisy, died in infancy while six others lived to be mature adults. They were Harriet Gautier (Hallie), the mother of Horton Foote, Jr., Laura Lee, Rosa Vaughn, Thomas Harry, John Speed, and William Smith. All the children were born and reared in the family's impressive home on Richmond Road where, surrounded by their aristocratic neighbors, they lived in Southern elegance and adhered to the Victorian manners and morality of their parents.

The background of Horton Foote's paternal ancestors is equally impressive, yet their story is quite different from that of his maternal forbearers. While the spirit of the Brooks family is revealed in its aristocratic pride and familial devotion, the Foote saga is one of lost inheritance and individual resilience in the face of familial rejection.

Horton Foote's paternal great-great-grandfather and namesake Albert Clinton Horton was born to William and Mary Ann Thomas Horton in Hancock County, Georgia, on September 4, 1798. Albert's father, a man of position and influence, died when his child was an infant. The management of the family's large plantation was to fall upon Albert Clinton's young shoulders until his mother married Colonel Samuel Dent and the family moved to La Grange, Alabama, in 1823.

In 1829, Albert married Eliza Holliday, the daughter of a prominent Georgia businessman; within three years of the marriage, he was elected to the Alabama State Senate, where he served one term. Following his brief stint as a senator, Albert took a decisive step. Giving up position, honor, and fame, he turned his face to Texas and cast his wealth and fortunes with the young empire. After arriving in Texas in 1834, he purchased several leagues of land in Matagorda, one of the principal seaport towns on the Gulf coast. That same year, Texas entered war with Mexico; and he immediately joined his fellow statesmen in their fight for freedom. Offering his money and services, Albert Clinton raised, mounted, and armed two companies of volunteers for the war effort. One group, known as the Mobile Greys, was commanded by David Burks while the other, a calvary of forty-two men known as the Matagorda Volunteers, was led by Colonel Albert Clinton Horton.

During the spring of 1836, Colonel Horton's contingent was stationed at Goliad, Texas, under the command of Colonel James Walker Fannin. Fannin had recently received orders from General Sam Houston to retreat from the area because he feared the Mexicans might initiate a major attack on Fannin's troops. Horton and a number of other leaders urged the Colonel to obey the demand, knowing that the small force at their disposal would be helpless against the larger Mexican army. Colonel Fannin, in a brave but reckless move,

disobeyed Houston and remained at Fort Goliad with his small band of three hundred and fifty men. Within a few days, the small Texas army was assaulted by one thousand Mexican soldiers under the command of General Urrea. As the Texans stood their ground, Fannin ordered Horton's calvary to skirmish in front of the main division while working its way to Victoria for reinforcements. After traveling only ten miles, Horton's calvary, stopped by the approach of Santa Anna's troops, hastened back to Goliad only to find Fannin's men surrounded and under siege. After several unsuccessful attempts to break through enemy lines, it became apparent that Horton and his men would have to retreat. Without reinforcements, Colonel Fannin was forced to surrender on March 7. Twenty days later, Fannin and his fellow Texans lost their lives to a Mexican firing squad. Colonel Albert Horton and his men escaped the massacre and joined Sam Houston's main body of troops in their march to the battle of San Jacinto.

Some people condemned Horton for not boldly rushing to Fannin's aid on that fateful day, but an eye-witness account of the incident speaks of the Colonel's bravery in action. Thomas Adams, who served with Horton at Goliad, defended his commander against criticism in a personal letter. He stated that Horton had done all in his power to relieve his companions and that an attempt to reach the battleground

would probably have resulted in the loss of the entire party:

> We were in your company under your command and we say without fear of contradiction, that your conduct was brave and manly on that occasion, that you reconnoitred three times attempting to regain Col. F's army, but that you were entirely cut off by Mexican troops. You then proposed to your company to force your way to Col. F. and rode out calling upon your company for all those who were willing to follow you, and force your way to Col. F. to ride out. But four men rode out. Prudence and officer-like conduct both forbid you and the little band of four, from making the rash attempt. Indeed we saw nothing in you to blame on that occasion, but your great anxiety to force your way with your small company to Col. F. ("Letter to Albert Clinton Horton" 20 July 1838).

The Goliad Massacre stood as the last tragedy of the Texas Revolution. The act of savagery excited the revulsion of the world, contributed to the fall of a Mexican dictator, and led to the formation of a new Texas Republic within which Colonel Albert Clinton Horton would play a major role.

As Horton had served his countrymen on the battlefield, so he served them in the political arena. From 1836 to 1838, he represented Matagorda County in the First and Second Congresses; and in 1839, he was one of five commissioners appointed to select a site for the capitol of Texas. He helped frame the constitution of the new Republic and was a member of the State Constitutional Convention of 1845, which was called to consider annexation by the United States. After Texas joined the Union in 1845, Horton became the state's first elected lieutenant governor. When Governor James Pinckney Henderson left office on May 19,

1846, to command military forces in Mexico, Horton was made acting governor. He held the post until July 1, 1847 (Williams 312).

By the time his political term ended, Albert Clinton Horton had become prosperous. He owned a home in Matagorda; a house and 35,000 acres of land near Austin; 4,000 acres of fertile farmland near Wharton (on which he built a beautiful mansion for his family); and the region's largest river valley plantation, "Sycamore Grove" (Abell interview, 8 Nov. 1988). A census of Wharton County in 1850 valued Horton's real estate holdings at $105,610; and from these riches, he contributed much to the educational and spiritual needs of his fellow countrymen. He donated a portion of his land in Matagorda to erect the state's first Episcopal sanctuary and another in Wharton to build that town's first Baptist church. Noted for his kindness and generosity to the poor, Horton saw to it that a section of the Baptist church would accommodate his 120 slaves who desired to worship with their master. Throughout his life Horton remained charitable; and as a final gift, he donated $5,000 to establish Baylor University, Texas' first Baptist college (Abell interview, 8 Nov. 1988).

Albert Clinton Horton--war hero, prominent politician, successful businessman, religious and civic leader, and devoted family man--throughout his life earned the esteem of the people and the state which he had helped develop. But

to this happy and impressive life, the Civil War brought a sad ending; for by 1865, Horton had lost his fortune, and in September of that year, he died "quietly, at his summer home in Matagorda" (Abell interview, 8 Nov. 1988). Although the failure of the Southern cause had taken its toll, the tradition which grew out of Albert Clinton Horton's brave endurance of hardships was to become a prominent theme in the writings of his great-great-grandson Horton Foote.

Albert Clinton Horton left behind his wife Eliza and two children, Patience Louisiana Texas (born September 21, 1836) and Robert John (born March 21, 1844). Both Patience and Robert had been reared in a manner befitting children of such an illustrious father. They had been educated in the finest schools, taught the necessary social graces, the proper gestures, the correct posture and gait, the way a lady held a fan, and the way a gentleman bowed at the waist; yet neither seemed prepared for the difficult task of "salvaging what remained of their father's estates" (Abell interview, 8 Nov. 1988). Prior to his death, Horton had willed an equal amount of property and slaves to both children, hoping each would carry on his enterprises. However, the freeing of the slaves in 1865 meant the loss of a vital work force and signaled the end of the Southern way of life.

The manner in which Sycamore Grove plantation was eventually saved and Horton's property divided became a

source of tension and confusion among family members. Much of what happened between brother and sister is speculation. One story assumes that Robert, ill-equipped to handle the requirements of caring for his father's businesses, sold his inheritance to Patience and her husband Isaac Dennis, a notable lawyer and judge of Wharton County. Robert and his mother Eliza left Wharton, and Patience remained on the plantation until her death. The Dennis family retained ownership of the plantation for more than five generations, and the home served the family until it was demolished in 1960 (Abell interview, 8 Nov. 1988).

Some of Robert's descendants remembered the proceedings quite differently. One legend has it that in the 1850s, Albert Clinton Horton had enrolled his son in a prestigious New York boarding school. While there, Robert was excessively teased about his Southern heritage and his habit of wearing long hair plaited in a queue. The young man soon grew homesick for Sycamore Grove; and within a few weeks, Albert Horton arrived in New York to carry him home. As they were boarding the Texas-bound train, Governor Horton saw a young orphaned child selling papers on the street corner. Having himself grown up without a father, Horton was immediately drawn to the boy, whom he later adopted and educated as a lawyer. Because of his legal background, the adopted son was put in charge of the family holdings after Horton's death and later fell prey to the chicanery of Isaac

Dennis who established himself as proprietor of Sycamore Grove (Foote interview, 18 Nov. 1988). Robert apparently received nothing from his father's estate; his inheritance was lost and his birthright stolen.

Following his father's death, Robert tried to build a new life as a merchant, but he had little success. Economic conditions in Wharton were so bad during Reconstruction that the young man could not survive as a shopkeeper, and he was forced to accept a more secure job as a lighthouse operator on the Gulf Coast. He and his family lived on Matagorda Bay until a Gulf hurricane devastated the area and left them homeless in 1886. Robert and his wife Mary Hawes soon returned to Wharton where they built a home and reared six children (Abell interview, 8 Nov. 1988).

The truth behind the Horton legacy will be forever clouded by the passage of time and subjectivity of memory. We do know that the Horton children, deprived of social position and wealth, struggled for survival in a world that was often perilous and unfair. Robert's only son, Albert Clinton II (1875-1939), became a merchant, married Mabel Martin, and reared three daughters, Willa, Bertsy, and Mabel. Robert's oldest daughter, Mary (1873-1908), died of tuberculosis after moving to West Texas. Loula (1871-1947), the wife of J.E. Irvin, a prominent Wharton physician, eventually became the main source of family history for her great-nephew Horton Foote. Renie (1878-1927) married a

wealthy Wharton druggist and rancher, A.A. Rugeley. Lida (1880-1961) married Wharton's postmaster, T.J. Abell, who died from influenza following World War I, and was forced to rear her two boys on the modest income she made from a boarding house operation. Corella (1869-1940) married Albert Foote and to this union were born two children, Lilyan Dale and Albert Horton Foote (Abell interview, 8 Nov. 1988).

Horton Foote's paternal grandfather, Albert Foote, died at a young age. One of twelve children, he was descended from an aristocratic family who had come to Texas from Virginia during the 1840s. His mother was Elizabeth Robedaux Foote (whose American heritage reached as far back as the Revolutionary War), and his father John had been a wealthy cotton broker in Galveston (Foote interview, 18 Nov. 1988). John Foote also owned a fleet of ships and made a fortune buying and selling cotton for the Confederacy during the war years. Most of John and Elizabeth's children were well educated; for example, Minnie was a noted school teacher in Houston, John Robedaux a Greek and Latin scholar, Stephen a medical doctor, and Albert a highly respected lawyer. John Robedaux and Stephen later established Wharton's first weekly newspaper, the Wharton Eagle, in 1886 and served the community in this capacity until the early 1900s. Family members were noted for their intellectual prowess, but they were also remembered for their inability

to overcome the loss of wealth and prestige in the wake of the Civil War. Shortly after the war, John Foote died; and the family moved to the small town of Columbus, Texas. Later, Elizabeth bought a boarding house in Wharton where she and her children tried to survive off the meager income of this business.

When Albert Foote married Corella Horton in 1889, their future together seemed promising but their relationship quickly soured. The reasons for this have never been fully determined, but legend has it that Albert and Corrie were unable to cope with the emotional and financial demands of the larger Foote family (Foote interview, 18 Nov. 1988). By the time they married, Albert had become his family's sole provider, and they all lived together in a small house in Wharton. Corrie, who cooked the meals and cared for the children, began to feel helplessly put upon by her extended family. Her resentment often caused quarrels between her and her mother-in-law, Elizabeth. Corrie grew distant and remote; and after the birth of her second child, she returned to her mother and father. Albert began to drink heavily. At the young age of thirty-six, he died in 1902 from the bitter mixture of alcohol and cigarettes.

The harsh realities of family life weighed heavily upon Albert's children. Albert Horton (the playwright's father) was twelve and Lily Dale was ten when their father died. Neither child was mature enough to understand the

circumstances surrounding their parents' estrangement or their father's death. Lily Dale remained close to her mother and with time grew bitter towards her father and paternal family. Often, she would defend her mother's actions by proclaiming to friends and relatives that her father was a "drunkard and cigarette fiend" (Foote interview, 18 Nov. 1988). Albert Horton's attitude was different from that of his sister. He was devoted to his father, and neither time nor family stories would ever diminish the love and respect he had for his father. Years later, his own son Horton Foote would recall:

> I often questioned my father about the day my grandfather died, but he wouldn't say much except that it was a sad time, and his father was considered a brilliant lawyer. He told me that on the day of the funeral his father's best friend had taken him in his lap and told him that his father was a fine man and that he should always be proud of him. When my Grandfather Foote died there was not enough money to buy a tombstone for his grave and so it was unmarked until my father, when he was twenty-seven, married and with a child of his own, took his first savings and bought the tombstone for his father's grave. (Foote interview, 18 Nov. 1988)

Albert Horton Foote's relationship with his mother was threatened when, a year after her husband's death, Corrie married C.P. Cleveland, a railroad engineer, and moved to Houston. Mr. Cleveland offered to rear Lily as his own child. He dressed her in fine clothes, bought her presents, and paid for her tuition to music school; but for whatever reason, whether incompatibility or disinterest, Cleveland refused to extend his graciousness to young Albert Horton.

He would not allow the boy to live in his home, and he resented the child's occasional visits. Corrie appears to have done little to soothe her son's growing hatred of the step-father, nor did she stop the humiliation to which the boy was subjected. Perhaps the most revealing example of Corrie' relationship with her son was expressed by her grandson, Horton Foote:

> The classic story is that my father couldn't live with her but she would give him breakfast each morning. But my father had to be out of the house each morning by five. He never put all this together until one morning he arrived at seven and his mother met him at the door. 'Thank you son for buying me the eggs,' she said, 'I'm so grateful to you.' My father thought she was unusually nervous and he looked over his shoulder and there sat Mr. Cleveland. His mother was not able to tell him the truth or to invite him inside. That's the kind of humiliation he went through. Afterwards he never wrote his mother and when he traveled to Houston he never wanted to call her. Once a year she would come to Wharton for a week's visit with her sisters. One of those days was always spent at our house visiting with my mother. She always arrived after my father had gone to his store, and would leave before he returned home at night. 'How was Mama?' he would ask on his return home, opening the evening paper and beginning to read before my mother could call out in her cheery voice, 'Just fine.' He never ostensibly expressed hostility but there was total indifference on his part. I know he could not bear the sight of the man she married. (Foote interview, 18 Nov. 1988)

Abandoned, young Albert Horton turned to his grandparents, aunts, and uncles for help. His early years were spent with his grandfather and grandmother Horton in Wharton. Since all of the Horton family members lived within a few blocks of one another, the boy developed a close bond with his aunts, Mary, Lida, and Renie, as well as

with his Uncle Albert. But it was his Aunt Louisiana Texas Patience Irvin who accepted the task of mothering him after the death of his grandparents and, as Horton Foote has stated, "Through Aunt Loula's encouragement my father's emotional identification was nourished" (Foote interview, 18 Nov. 1988).

Throughout his life, Albert Horton never stopped searching for his own identity; Horton Foote would state years later, "My father was constantly reminded of his heritage, but aristocratic or not he had to fight for survival and he lived by his wits" (Foote interview, 18 Nov. 1988). He remained loyal to his family, but his sense of personal loss was great. He had been deprived of a father and rejected by his mother but he seems never to have dwelled on the injustices done. His was a life of sacrifice, and his childhood was spent in pursuit of a single dream--"to belong to a family" (Foote interview, 18 Nov. 1988).

Albert Horton Foote was a tall, handsome, good-natured lad who dealt honestly and graciously with the public; and even though his schooling had stopped in adolescence when his father died, he seldom went unemployed. He seems to have recognized at an early age that he could build a career around the merchandizing business. When he was twelve, his Uncle Albert gave him his first job as a clerk in a plantation store; and in his late teens, the young man

managed a store in Glen Flora, a rural community ten miles south of Wharton. He also traveled as a salesman in Alabama, Mississippi, and East Texas.

In 1914, Albert Horton bought a small cleaning and pressing shop in his hometown of Wharton. During this time, he began to court Hallie Brooks. They had known each other since childhood, and Horton remembered watching "the little girl with skinny legs as she and her friends passed the store in which he worked" (Foote interview, 18 Nov. 1988). Now she had grown tall and had developed into a kind, generous, and beautiful woman. Having searched for true companionship all his life, Horton proposed and she accepted. However, as family members recall, Hallie's father did not favor the match, partly because her chosen mate had earned a reputation as "somewhat of a hell-raiser" and partly because Mr. Brooks thought no man "worthy of his daughter's hand in marriage" (Outlar interview, 8 Nov. 1988). Tom Brooks appears to have been a moral man who loved his family deeply, but he was known to be domineering and strict. He strongly opposed his daughter's dating anyone who practiced the sins of "drinking, gambling, or dancing"; and he refused to sanction the engagement (Outlar interview, 8 Nov. 1988). Once before, Mr. Brooks had refused to allow Hallie to marry a young man of her choosing. Although the girl defied her father by seeing the

boy, she succumbed to her father's wishes and refused the young man's proposal.

The family echoed the father's serious doubts about young Foote and wondered why a young lady of Hallie's social standing wanted to marry a humble merchant. As one family member noted, "Not one in a hundred persons in Wharton would have given the marriage a chance but they were obviously wrong" (Outlar interview, 8 Nov. 1988). Few understood the love that Hallie felt for Horton, and her parents were apparently unsympathetic to the fears and doubts she must have felt. But Hallie's devotion to Horton was undeniable; and with iron determination, she took her first steps toward independence. On Valentine's Day, February 14, 1915, Hallie Brooks eloped with Albert Horton Foote; and they were subsequently wedded, but the stakes of their marriage were high (Foote interview, 18 Nov. 1988). Mr. Tom severed all ties with his daughter for over a year, and the strained relationship between the proud father and son-in-law was never fully relieved. Although Brooks' distaste for Horton was partially soothed in time, he apparently did not forgive the deception of the elopement.

The details of the early married life of Horton and Hallie Foote from 1915 to 1916 may never be entirely clear, but this much is certain: Albert Horton's entire world revolved around his bride. He was devoted to her, and she adored him. For nearly two years they lived in a "single

room apartment in Mrs. Houston's boarding house on Burleson Street and took their meals next door at the home of Mrs. Walker, "a family friend" (Foote interview, 18 Nov. 1988). Horton continued to work in his pressing shop while Hallie created a loving home environment to which her husband retreated each day from the corroding cares and disappointments of the business world.

To those who knew them, the Footes were, and would always be, a very private pair. Albert Horton did not seek the limelight of public office or desire any part of civic organizations, but he was a well-liked and respected member of the Wharton community. He believed strongly in the value of hard work, and most of his waking hours were spent scratching out a modest living. Although he would never be a financial giant like his father-in-law, Albert Horton would be remembered as an assiduous provider and devoted family man. Hallie's world was equally self-contained. Having enjoyed the privileges to which her family status entitled her, she was often invited to prestigious parties and social gatherings but rarely accepted, choosing instead to spend the time with her husband. Relatives and friends recall that Hallie and Horton were "totally absorbed in each other, and in all the years of their marriage they were never separated for longer than one day" (Foote interview, 18 Nov. 1988). In March of 1916, Hallie gave birth to her

first son; and from that time on, she dedicated her life to being a wife and mother.

The birth of their son, Horton Foote, was an important event for the family primarily because it began a reconciliation process that reunited Hallie with her father. The high-minded Mr. Brooks apologized to his daughter and son-in-law after the child was born, thereby mending the emotional scars left from the previous year. In addition, he built the couple a house next to his own as an offering of peace. Although Albert Horton never claimed ownership of the property, he did move his family to 515 North Houston Street in 1917 (Foote interview, 18 Nov. 1988). There Horton Foote, the future playwright, spent his childhood listening to the tales of his family.

Horton Foote's birthplace was, as he remembers, a special kind of world. Wharton County was an area with considerable historical consciousness, having been one of the first areas settled when Stephen F. Austin led families to the Gulf Coast of Texas. Annie Lee Williams explains in The History of Wharton County that "when Austin brought his first settlers to the county in 1822 they chose for their home the alluvial land adjacent to the Caney and the Colorado River. These early settlers saw switch cane along the Creek that dwarfed man and beast, and picturesque trees laden with Spanish moss. Here was soil rich enough to provide luxurious growth for cotton, corn, cane, sorghum and

alfalfa; grasses so lush they were to be responsible for the founding of a town; full rivers and creeks to meet man's needs" (1).

Historically, Wharton County was a westward extension of the Cotton Kingdom; and as late as 1916, the town of Wharton lived and died by the cotton crop. For many years the fields had been worked by slave and convict laborers; but by the turn of the century, tenant farmers constituted over fifty percent of the area's work force. Local merchants who managed to stay in business sold on credit to the neighboring planters and farmers while waiting for harvest time. Although nature had been good to the region, the promise of bountiful yields could never be taken for granted since Gulf hurricanes, drought, or floods often brought disaster. Horton Foote remembers that the people "spent a great deal of their time watching the skies" (Foote interview, 18 Nov. 1988). The county courthouse is filled with the dismal records of merchants who overstocked their shelves and had their goods sold at auction to satisfy creditors.

As Horton Foote became old enough to wander beyond the lawn of his family's Victorian-style home, he discovered the wonders around him. He tested the sweet spring grasses, listened to the melodies of the songbirds, and observed the profusion of brilliantly colored bluebonnets and wildflowers that appeared each spring. He remembers the squares of

dark, rich earth where the plow had turned the soil, the patterns that were created when rows of seedlings began to sprout, and the wide cotton fields that gilded the land. In Autumn, the pecan trees dropped their fruit and then flared red and orange while the harvested fields turned to darkened brown. The rural days of his childhood, beginning with daybreak and ending when darkness fell, no doubt left the young boy with a profound feeling for the companionship of nature and an acute sensitivity to its moods. In his unpublished essay "Seeing and Imagining," Foote describes the world of his early childhood:

> I am sitting on the back porch of my house in Wharton as I begin to write this, the house that I was brought to when I was not quite a year old, thinking how is it possible that I got from this house in this quiet, self-contained provincial town to New York City to become a writer. My first memory of this porch as a child, it faces direct west, was a place of extreme heat in the summer and of cold in the winter. It was screened in so flies and mosquitoes could not get at you, and it was tolerable in the milder days of fall and spring. At night, except for sweltering July and August ones, it was pleasant enough, but never so pleasant as our front porch which faced east and south, and where there was nearly always a breeze, from the Gulf my parents always said. From the Gulf, too, came the large white clouds that scurried across the sky night and day. When I was a boy, our back yard was fenced in and we had a chicken house and a yard full of chickens. There was only one pecan tree then, and there were three fig trees and two chinaberry trees. My grandparents gave the house and its yard to my parents. They owned fifteen acres around their house and they took out of that a half acre for our house and yard. To the left of our yard was my grandfather's barn. When I was a very young boy, he kept a horse and a cow there. At the far end of this lot is a giant pecan tree, at least two hundred years old. I spent much time climbing this tree. I had to nail boards to the trunk to make a kind of

ladder to help me reach its branches. To the right of our yard and across the street were cotton fields belonging to my grandfather and beyond them were cotton fields belonging to my great, great uncle. These cotton fields went right up to the back edge of the town itself, to the livery stable and a section known as the 'Flats' that had black restaurants and a black barber shop and pool hall. The dirt road in front of our house when I was a child was unnamed, but the street in front of my grandparent's house was called Richmond Road, and some of the most elegant houses in town were here. The two houses directly across from my grandparents had large acreages around them, too. In one of these houses lived a boy my age who became my best friend. His parents had come from Mississippi, and his father managed the cotton gin and oil mill. The land back of their house went down to the gin and my friend and I often went over to it climbing upon the platforms where the bales of cotton were kept, racing each other across them. During cotton season the gins were the busiest places in town. We had three in those days and my friend's father managed the most prosperous one. Often during cotton season as many as sixty wagons would be lined up on the dirt road fronting the gin waiting to get into the gin yard. Also during cotton season and late in the fall and early winter the smell of cotton seed coming from the oil mill permeated our part of town and to me it was always a pleasant odor. I was turned loose to roam as I chose through the land belonging to my grandparents and my friend's parents. I wonder now what my parents were thinking of, usually so protective and strict about where I went. I had no secrets from them and they knew we spent a great deal of time at my friend's back pastures, which were crossed by Caney Creek, dry most of the year. Here we spent hours with older boys endlessly digging tunnels and caves deep enough for us to stand in. I don't remember when I first read or had read to me Tom Sawyer, but I do know early on I envied Tom's adventures in the caves around Hannibal, and also I don't know if our inspiration for forming endless clubs and secret societies were inspired by Tom or whether we thought of it ourselves. We dug caves, built club houses, climbed trees and built tree houses. These pastures belonging to my grandparents and my friend's father and mother were in these early years my contained world, my garden, my Eden as it were--and I spent most of my early waking days when not in school roaming its confines. (1-3)

Each evening Horton's parents would spend hours on the front porch; and since Horton's bedroom faced the veranda, he often overheard their discussions about the "day's events, dances my father had attended as a young man, friends and family who had died or moved away" (Foote interview, 18 Nov. 1988). He also heard their serious talks about the life-or-death power of the weather and learned to accept, as most children do, the brutality of the melodrama around him as the underside of the life force.

The town of Wharton was the county seat; it had a courthouse, a respectable Main Street, two railroad stations, three cotton gins, and a handful of stores that continued to survive in spite of economic uncertainty. Wharton was populated by 3000 people of widely diverse cultures: there were aristocrats who could trace their arrival to the 1830s, Negro families who came with them as slaves, and Mexicans who crept in as "wetbacks" during cotton-picking time. For the most part, town life conformed to the characteristics, principles, and practices of Southern social philosophy. A majority of the population were black and legally free from slavery, but the tradition of white supremacy continued while the country-gentry ideal flourished. Life was unhurried and the belief in a fixed, divinely ordained social order was taken for granted, as were stability, the art of hospitality, and a keen sense of the genteel life. Eppie Davidson, a long-time Wharton

resident, remembers that there also existed "a strong division between the social classes. The town considered itself part of the Old South, and there was a lot of resentment between those who were aristocratic and those who weren't" (Eppie Davidson interview, 12 March 1988). Prominent families, proud of tradition and the values of Christian life, distrusted the ideals of material progress and the mingling of cultures. They spent much of their energy and talent upholding the values of what they believed to be a finer and gentler era. Social life was arranged around the front parlor, the school, and the church. Men of Southern heritage gave the respectable title of "Miss" to any woman when addressing her, Negroes who had long worked for the same white employers were referred to as "my Negroes," and the phrase "old and prominent" invariably preceded the word family (Williams 290). The paths of wealthy landowners and merchants seldom crossed those of the tenant farmers, servants, and day laborers; and segregation prevailed even in death--there were separate cemeteries for whites, blacks, and Mexicans. Although the morality of such a life was being questioned prior to World War I, the enduring power of the Southern-Victorian values seemed forever fixed.

Horton Foote's early years were relatively unaffected by outside pressures. He knew very little about the United States' war with Germany in 1917 or the mysterious epidemic

of Spanish influenza that passed through his hometown that year, leaving many of his relatives and neighbors dead. He was too young to remember the feelings of jubilation when Wharton celebrated the return of its young men from war in 1918. Although he would learn about these things in time, Foote's earliest recollections are of the enormous love of family and of being constantly surrounded by his mother, father, aunts, uncles, great-aunts and great-uncles, grandfather and grandmother, and myriad first, second, third, fourth, and fifth cousins who doted over him endlessly. Horton apparently got all the attention he needed, which was probably more than that required by the ordinary child, for as he later revealed, "I was the only child and grandchild for over five and a half years. I knew that all the adults loved me. I was the center of the world" (Foote interview, 18 Nov. 1988).

Horton is remembered as a quiet and polite child, always intently observing everything around him. He seems to have acquired his father's obsessive interest in the past because much of his youth was spent at the feet of obliging elders listening to tales of family history. He later admitted that "over half my plays are based on stories that my father told me. He loved to speculate about the past, what might have happened if this had happened or why did this happen this way. I know that's where I got my own

curiosity and speculative nature" (Foote interview, 18 Nov. 1988).

Foote's relatives were gifted storytellers, and he was a precocious listener. He told Samuel Freedman in an 1986 New York Times interview that "when I was growing up . . . I spent half my time in the house listening. I always adored old people, and you know they always adored me, because I could sit and listen for hours. Ask 'em this, that, get 'em off on tangents. Often, I'd go home and mimic them for my mother. And I always wanted to go back for more" (50). These stories told of individual courage, undaunted family devotion, of relatives and neighbors who displayed extraordinary determination or sacrifice, and of the sometimes humorous eccentricities of family members. Most of them were about friends or ancestors who had lived before Horton's time, but he remembers that these people and events became as real to him as if he had lived among them. Young Horton was spared nothing:

> I was never told to leave the room no matter how gruesome or unhappy the tale and so early on I learned to accept the tragic events as part of life. I heard in lurid detail of feuds, hurt feelings, suicide, jealousies, passions, scoundrels of all kinds and descriptions and what my young mind made of it all I'm not sure, but I am sure I never tired of listening. One of my favorites told by both my aunts and grandparents was of poor Henry Lowell (not his real name) who lived alone with his mother and was having an alleged affair with their black cook. The Ku Klux Klan decided to make an example of what they considered his immorality and grabbed him in broad daylight, tarred and feathered him, turning him loose on the courthouse square. He ran covered with the tar and feathers two blocks to his home.

> Everyone had his own version of the story and long after the poor man's death, sooner or later it would be told again as if it had happened the day before. When I was older and went to the picture show alone at night, I had to pass his house. I would see him sitting alone on his gallery and I would try to imagine what it was like being tarred and feathered and set loose on the courthouse square. There were few street lights in those days and I imagined his house was haunted and I would get by it as fast as I could. ("Seeing and Imagining" 10-11)

Such familial tales would, in time, provide the grist for Foote's many plays and films. Horton was fascinated with how the events of the past were constantly reorganized and shaped by the storyteller's imagination. He especially enjoyed listening to his Aunt Loula's dramatic tales. Foote recalls that she was extremely loyal to her family; and she kept the family stories alive, not always with great accuracy, but with imagination, vividness and gusto: "Hers was a world of absolutes. The Hortons, particularly her immediate branch, were aristocrats, betrayed and cheated out of their birthright, but undauntable, all virtuous, surrounded by a world of knaves and thieves--common baggage. When she would tell her tales, growing more lurid through the years, she would cock her head to one side, close her eyes slightly and her voice would take on a heightened quality, almost a chant as she recounted the history of her family, and she never tired of telling it to any of the nieces and nephews that would listen" ("Seeing and Imagining" 10). Young Horton would often ask his Aunt Loula to describe an event and then have another relative tell the

same story. In the process, the young boy learned an important lesson about the subjectivity of memory and how accepted truths often change with time and circumstance. Foote later explained, "I'm a fifth-generation Texan and there are seven generations of Texans begun now in my family. I've learned that you can hear the same story told by six or seven people, and even though they think it's the same story, it's not. Every version is personal, it's subjective and all of them are telling the truth as they see it" (Foote interview, 18 Nov. 1988). Foote's obsession with this curious phenomenon is one method by which he reveals the inner lives of his many characters.

Listening to his family, Foote discovered a great deal about the importance of place, about the sense of belonging to a noble tradition, and about the values by which to live; but there was something else in these stories beyond the obvious virtues of respect, loyalty, and sacrifice. This additional quality was an integrity that brought his family through honorable lives to deaths that they did not seem to fear. And there was more: something that escapes definition just as it does analysis, a kind of grace or dignity that descended from both his maternal and paternal ancestors. Indeed, behind young Foote lay many people whose show of courage in times of trouble had influenced his own character; and their spirit would haunt him for the rest of his life.

> I believe very deeply in the human spirit, and I have a sense of awe about it because I don't know how people carry on. I look around and I say, chemically or whatever it is, what makes the difference in people? What is it? I've known people that the world has thrown everything at to discourage them, to kill them, to break their spirit. And yet something about them retains a dignity. They face life and they don't ask for quarters. There is my great-aunt Nanny--widowed, four children, living on the charity of a brother, never had anything. Yet always had dignity, never complained. You always wanted her around, always went to her for comfort, for solace. I've just seen example after example of people enduring things I absolutely couldn't. I'm always measuring myself. Could I do that? Could I take that? (qtd. in Freedman 50)

Foote took great pride in being part of such an illustrious group, but there were demands as well as rewards. Foote remembers that there was a continuous fear of family scrutiny: "We loved each other, but you know, we talked about each other. When my mother used to come to the house, she'd call a warning to the gossips as she walked down the path--Hoo, Hoo, Hallie's comin', Hallie's comin'" (qtd. in Darnton 22). And Horton learned that in the kind of extended family in which he grew up, where a sixth or seventh cousin is kin, there is a chance that one does not like his relative or that he may be competing with him:

> One day a descendant of the niece that according to my great aunt had stolen our house and lands came into my father's store. My father greeted him by calling him cousin, and he bought a hat and they talked together for awhile about the weather and the crops. When he left and I was told who he was and that he lived on the Horton plantation I said hotly, 'How could you talk to him, cousin or not?' My father said, 'Don't fill your head with all that. That's done. Forget it.' 'Have you forgotten it?' I asked, 'Yes, I have,' he said, 'That and a lot

> more. You have to too, if you don't want to be swallowed up in bitterness'." ("Seeing and Imagining" 11-12)

Thus, at a very early age, Foote learned about the peculiarities of family relationships. According to Foote, "Even now if I go home and don't call everybody, feelings are sometimes hurt" (Foote interview, 18 Nov. 1988).

Young Horton was always very close to his Grandmother Brooks. He described her as being "very feminine, fiercely aristocratic to her toenails," and a woman with "an enormous sense of pride" (Foote interview, 18 Nov. 1988). Although she was not demonstrative in her affections, the young boy adored her; and since it was only a short distance to her house, he visited her every day. Horton relished the moments Miss Daisy spent recounting her early childhood in Columbia, her experiences as a governess and secretary, her courtship with Mr. Brooks, and the lives of her aristocratic ancestors. More importantly, Horton was made to feel special by his grandmother; and he grew up knowing that this tiny woman would respond to his every request. He admits that "she offered an enormous sense of security. I always knew that if I ever needed anything, I could call on her. Time after time her generosity saved me" (Foote interview, 18 Nov. 1988).

Horton's feelings for his grandfather were not as clear. They fluctuated between devotion and awe. Tom Brooks was a devoted grandfather, but he was also a man of

great power who expected much from his family. Through hard work and determination, he had risen from the poverty of his youth to become Wharton's most prestigious citizen; and he had set an example that few could ever hope to match. Brooks served the township in a number of capacities: he was a merchant, a county treasurer, an officer in the White Man's Union, a financier, and a real estate investor. He was also an imaginative speculator who, in the 1920s, embarked upon a business venture that brought his family immense wealth while changing the face of Wharton forever.

Wharton was a very insular community in 1920, and its people seldom thought of changes taking place within their town. Life was suspended in a timeless ritual governed by the rhythms of nature and traditions of the past. Once the plantation system had flourished; but many of the plantations had since been abandoned, leaving thousands of acres idle and the five or six families who owned the land unsure of the future. Following World War I, a flood of Central European immigrants, fleeing their war-stricken homeland, entered the Gulf Coast region in search of a new beginning and a spot of land on which to rear a family. Tom Brooks realized the financial potential at hand, quickly acquired most of the farmland surrounding Wharton, divided the plantations into smaller plots, and sold them to the immigrant families. He retained and managed a number of the farms himself and lent money to tenants who worked his

fields. Although Brooks amassed a fortune from this endeavor, he must have been extremely generous because as Foote remembers, "For many years my family encountered people who had borrowed money in order to escape economic ruin" (Foote interview, 18 Nov. 1988). The breaking up of the plantations into smaller farms and ranches marked the inevitable end of Wharton's aristocratic way of life; and in time, that tradition became nothing more than memory kept alive by the old men and women of the region. Through Brooks' efforts, the town had unwittingly moved into the modern era; and by the 1930s, the thought, tastes, and culture of the middle class had gained dominance.

Some of Horton Foote's most vivid childhood memories are of riding with his grandfather to check on his many farms scattered over Wharton County. In his essay, "The Trip to Paradise," he recalls that the roads then were dirt and gravel; and it was difficult to visit all the farms in one afternoon or even one day since visiting every farm meant getting out of the car and talking with the tenant farmers, inquiring about their health and that of their wives and children, and walking into each field to inspect the present state of the cotton crops. To get to the farms, they would pass tiny, dwindling towns which had once bustled with the sounds of community life but had since been abandoned; they rode by deserted landscapes with no sign of a store, a building, or a house. He is reminded of his

grandfather's remarks that "somewhere in this area had been a town--now vanished completely--or this is where our house used to be; it was a thriving river town once, East Columbia. Boats went from here up the river. Once. Once" (142).

Indelibly etched in the boy's mind was a vision of what remained of his grandfather's hometown--seven weathered plantation houses, one decaying store, and a small cluster of live oak trees that had once surrounded his ancestral home. He knew that it had not always been like that: "When I was growing up, there was a photograph in my home of a large, impressive house that stood on the banks of the Brazos River. There was a circle of live oaks in the front yard. Also in the yard were a number of children and three adults, some of them playing a game of croquet. This was the home of my grandfather's parents--a house he lived in until he went off to college. After his mother died and the other children moved away to other towns, it was abandoned and finally torn down" (142).

This was the first abandoned house that young Horton had been made aware of, and the thought of it seized his childish imagination. He would try to reconstruct the past, pushing the river back to its boundaries, trying to imagine that day when the picture of the house was taken with his aunts, uncles, and cousins standing primly dressed in their

best clothes. And he would remember the stories told to him about the life of the house:

> There was a family legend of why the house was wood instead of brick. It seems that my great-grandmother before meeting my great-grandfather went to a fortune teller and was told by her that a man would ask her to marry him and that he would come to her across the water and that he would build a brick house after their marriage and that she was not to permit this, for if she did, it would be a house of great sorrow. So when my great-grandfather came to Texas from Virginia (he got there by boat) he met my great-grandmother and after, I presume, a suitable courtship asked her to marry him and she accepted his proposal. He said then that he was building a brick house for them, and she, remembering the fortune teller said that if he built a brick house she wouldn't marry him, so he built the wood frame house of the picture instead. And I remember the story of how poor the family became after the war and the death of my great-grandfather, how my great-grandmother and her two daughters, one widowed, one unmarried, lived on there with the children of the married daughter until my great-grandmother died and the two daughters and the children went to Galveston to live leaving the house and its once handsome furnishings deserted, uncared for. I was also told how various relatives living in the town came into the house and took what they wanted to grace their own homes. ("Seeing and Imagining" 7-8)

While riding by those near-forgotten places, he would always stop to ponder. Why was this town abandoned? Why was it never more than a few stores and a handful of houses? Why did the people leave and go to another place? The grandfather would try to soothe the boy's curiosity, explaining how towns came to be and for what purpose, how changes left some of them abandoned, and how many were never meant to be more than a couple of stores that served the tenant farmers and the one or two families who owned the surrounding farmland. Then in the silence that always

followed, they would both contemplate what Wharton might have been like if circumstances had been different and what that might have meant to their family.

Such experiences created a strong bond between grandfather and grandson and left the boy with a rich understanding of small-town life in America. At the end of his essay, Foote quotes the words of his favorite author Katherine Anne Porter whose thoughts seem to echo his own: "This summer country of my childhood, this place of memory, is filled with landscapes shimmering in light and color, moving with sounds and shapes I hardly ever describe, or put into my stories in so many words; they form only the living background of what I am trying to tell, so familiar to my characters, they would hardly notice them" ("The Trip to Paradise" 182). Here in this lovely and quiet agricultural region were picturesque scenes and country people, who later in fictional representation were to become symbols of the memories of Foote's childhood surroundings. In remembering this fertile cotton-growing community, he would find the originals for Columbus, Egypt, Richmond, Harrison, and other places of his plays. Because Horton Foote has remained sensitive to the joys and hardships of small town life, his works stand as memorials to an almost forgotten world.

The bond that formed between young Horton and his grandfather was unexpectedly shattered by Mr. Brooks' death on March 3, 1925. It was the most devastating event in the

child's life, and it would have a profound and lasting effect upon him. "The event that always stuck with me," he admits, "the event I've been groping toward as a writer, was the day my grandfather died. Until then, life was magic. I never felt so secure in my life as sitting on the porch swing and knowing I was the grandson of one of the richest families in town and my grandfather was the most respected man in town" (qtd. in Freedman 61).

Foote was only nine years old at the time, but he can still recall the incident in great detail:

> Until that time death had no reality for me. I was aware that my father's father was dead and that his mother had married again a man none of us liked very much, especially my father. How or when his father died I was never told, nor was it ever discussed what had happened to his people. The Footes were all vague blurs to me. I knew, too, that my mother often spoke of her Grandmother Brooks but never spoke of her grandfather. When I questioned her about this she said, 'I never knew him, he died when your grandfather was only twelve.' That worried me. My father's father had died when he was twelve and my grandfather's father died when he was twelve. John and Jenny Speed were the names of my grandmother Brooks' parents. They were dead before I was born. Grandpa Speed, as my mother called him, came to live with my grandparents until his death. My mother used to tell me how her grandmother Speed, a few years dead, had come to her in her sleep and said, 'Hallie, go see to your grandfather.' My mother woke up then and went to her grandfather's room to find him dead. Then, too, there was a lady in white that appeared at various times to relatives of my father's at Louisiana Texas Patience Horton's house. When she appeared, she would start combing her long blond hair. My great aunt said it resembled her sister Mary who died of tuberculosis in West Texas, and there were various theories about her appearing--one being that she was trying to tell the family that there was buried treasure under the house, or that oil might be found in the ground there. I would never spend the night at my great-

> aunt's house for fear she might appear to me, and sometimes in my own house I was afraid to go to sleep for fear someone dead might appear and tell me one of my living grandparents had died. I tried to sometimes imagine what death or dying was like, but I soon tired of it as it had no reality to me. Then in mid-March of my ninth year I came home from school, went all through the house looking for my mother, and when I couldn't find her went next door to a neighbor's who met me in her yard and said, 'I think you'd better go over to your grandmother's.' I went back through our silent house, into our back yard and slowly into my grandparent's back yard. Eliza, who cooked for my grandparents, and her sister Sarah were there. I went up to them as Eliza was saying, 'I knew someone in that house would die today when I saw a dove, a morning dove, light on the roof of the house.' I stood looking at them until they noticed me and Eliza said, 'Go in the house. Your mama is in there.' I started slowly toward the house when my mother appeared at the back door. She saw me then and came out to me. She was crying and she took me in her arms and held me and asked if I wanted to see my grandmother. I said I did, still not knowing what had happened, and she led me into the house, filled with people, men and women, dressed like it was Sunday all standing about and talking in low voices. Mother led me through the people to my grandparents' room and I saw my grandfather, his eyes closed lying on a couch and my grandmother sitting beside him. My mother said, 'Little Horton's here, Mama,' and my grandmother turned to me, and I saw she was crying and she held out her arms to me and I went over to her and she began to sob and held me as I looked at my grandfather and I realized that he was dead. I didn't learn how he died until the day of the funeral, which I was not allowed to attend. I was kept at home with my baby brother, watched over by my father's mother and one of her sisters, my great-aunt Lida. We could see the funeral procession from our porch and as we watched the slow movement of the hearse and the cars that followed, they told how my grandfather had been seized by a heart attack in town, collapsing on one of the main streets and dying before a doctor could reach him. ("Seeing and Imagining" 14-16)

Brooks' death brought enormous grief and hardship to the family. Miss Daisy mourned the loss of her husband for

over two years. Every afternoon she would visit his grave, and Horton would often go with her. He remembers that his grandmother always dressed in black, carried flowers, and sometimes she would sit and cry for hours. By observing his grandmother's daily ritual, the boy discovered that this mourning was a vital part of the healing process. He also learned that grief is a subject that is relevant for all times: "We're less allowed our grief [today], and I don't think it's a good thing. There was a time when there was a place for it, a period of mourning, the garb people wore. . . . When I was growing up, the dead were almost as alive as the living. People talked about them, remembered them, reminisced . . . now everything is so anonymous" (qtd. in Darnton 22).

While waiting for his grandmother to complete her visits, Horton would roam around the graveyard and imagine how each person was related to his family or how that person died. He was extremely curious about the stories of two small children, Jenny and Daisy, whose graves lay near his grandfather's. Horton had never heard their names mentioned, so when he got home, he asked his mother endless questions about them. He gleaned the following information:

> They were sisters. Jenny was born a year after my mother and Daisy was the sixth of my grandmother's eight children. Jenny died before reaching a year and Daisy was only two years old at the time of her death. My grandfather was very religious, attended church regularly and supported it generously with his money, but for some reason had never become a member. When Daisy died, mother said, one of the

> neighbors came to him and asked, 'Mr. Brooks, did it ever occur to you that the death of this child is God's judgement on you for not joining the church?' His face, my mother said, flushed, but he answered very simply, 'No, Mrs. Davidson, it never did.' Unless I asked about the two little girls they were never mentioned and there were no pictures of them anywhere. And this puzzled me greatly. Often, too, when I was with my grandmother at the graveyard I would wander the other graves and see how many children, often with lambs on their tombstones, died in infancy. ("Seeing and Imagining" 16-17)

For Foote, there was no escaping or ignoring the unpleasant phenomenon of death. As a child, the contemplation and acceptance of his loved ones' passing gave a new meaning to his own life; and as a writer, he would explore the mystery on numerous occasions.

If Miss Daisy introduced her grandson to the ways of death, she also taught him a great deal about the values by which to live. Foote remembers his grandmother as a remarkably resilient person; and in later years, he was exposed to her intelligence, strength, and fidelity in many ways. In the first place, she proved to be a shrewd business person who took the $50,000 in cash, the dozens of farms, and the pile of uncollected debts that her husband left her, and within a few short years greatly increased her fortune. More importantly, Miss Daisy was a strong matriarch who remained loyal to her children even though they brought her immense sorrow and shame. Horton Foote has said that "the one thing my grandmother could never understand was what went wrong with her sons" (Foote interview, 18 Nov. 1988).

The three Brooks boys had been reared in an atmosphere of respectability; and as children, they had enjoyed the privileges of deference, prestige, and social standing. Miss Daisy had fulfilled their every whim while their father had taught them to work hard and to carry themselves with dignity. Friends and relatives recall that they were extremely bright and likeable, but none was blessed with his father's drive for success. They appeared incapable of meeting his expectations. Foote remembers that Mr. Brooks had tried to motivate his sons by sending them to training academies, but they did poorly in their studies. After flunking out of school, each returned home; and as teenagers, they began to drink heavily. Within a few years, the three brothers developed into chronic alcoholics; and after their father died, they were tortured by one failure after another.

The oldest son Tom married Mabel Horton and had a child, but the marriage ended in divorce. Afterwards, Miss Daisy deeded Tom one of the family farms; but in less than a year, he had mortgaged it so heavily that his mother had to pay off the debt to get the farm back. He left Wharton soon after and for a time wandered around the world as a Merchant Seaman. He died at age fifty, a drunken derelict, picking fruit on an Arizona ranch. The younger brothers experienced much the same fate and were eventually forced to live off the charity of their mother who continued to rescue them

from their own destruction. Speed, the middle son, tried his hand at a cleaning and pressing business in Wharton, but his alcoholism soon led to the closing of his shop. He was later arrested for selling drugs in California and sent to San Quentin prison where he remained until he was fifty years old. After being paroled, he returned to Houston and lived the remainder of his life in the Millby Hotel, supported by income from his share of the family estate. After the youngest boy Billy attended Jefferson Law School in Dallas, Miss Daisy obtained a position for him with a Wharton legal firm; but within two months, he disappointed everyone when he got drunk, quit his practice, and sold his books. Later, Billy suffered brain damage and partial paralysis when he was beaten by his alcoholic wife. He died a lonely death in the same Houston hotel as his brother (Foote interview, 18 Nov. 1988).

The Brooks boys fell prey to the same malady as many other young men of similar background who had come of age in the Great Depression of the 1930s. As children, their parents had protected them from adversity and hardships; as adults, they began to see their aristocratic way of life threatened by the changes that were taking place in Wharton. Despite their father's early guidance, the boys seemed unable to find direction or purpose in their lives. By the time the Great Depression occurred, they had become alcoholics, each on a course of self-destruction.

The perilous decade of the '30s had come unexpectedly. A great demand for agricultural products during the war, along with the discovery of mineral wealth, had created unprecedented prosperity in the Gulf Coast region of Texas. There was a universal feeling that these days would last forever. The flood of oil which began in 1925 and the discovery of the world's largest sulphur deposit on March 20, 1929, was providential to many Wharton residents. Poverty-stricken families became relatively wealthy overnight, new jobs were created, and the town grew as hundreds of people poured into the region. Historians have noted that these material enticements during the '20s encouraged American businessmen into get-rich-quick schemes; many, apparently, did not care whom they had to step on or destroy to prosper financially. But by 1930, this optimism turned to bewilderment because the price of cotton had fallen to less than five cents per pound and oil had dropped to ten cents a barrel. Merchants faced inevitable ruin; oil was poured into earthen pits while its owners searched desperately for buyers, and farmers dumped their cotton along the roads to rot because the sale price was less than the cost of ginning. The business world suddenly became a jungle in which only the fittest could survive; people whose individual identities were intrinsically linked to their economic status saw their comfortable way of life disappear. Wharton, along with the rest of rural America, was changing.

This economic collapse brought despair to Wharton farmers and to the merchants who serviced them. Rural and small town America began to realize that their former lifestyles must now change. Perhaps Horton Foote's explanation of his uncles' tragic lives speaks to a universal struggle of the era:

> By the time my uncles came along, Papa didn't have his store any longer and he was a loan agent who bought and sold land that none of my family ever worked. It was all worked by tenant farmers and in that sense there was no meaning to the boys' lives. Unless you were a doctor, a lawyer, or a merchant there was nothing for you to do in Wharton. Of course the doctors were all starving in those days and the lawyers weren't doing much better. There was simply no incentive. There was nothing. The wealthier young men were given money, sent to college, and if they came back they merely took over the land. Maybe they would go out twice a week to see how the tenants were doing but other than that there was nothing for them to do. They thought of themselves as rich boys but they weren't. They were land rich but they still had to care for the land, pay off the mortgage, and they often had hard times when the crops failed. So, many of them became drunkards. Across the track there were women one could get for one or two dollars. The young boys had no sense of that either. There was simply no order to their lives, it had all been broken up, along with the plantations. (Foote interview, 18 Nov. 1988)

Fortunately, Horton Foote and his younger brothers did not have to endure the same types of hardships that his uncles and other young men of their generation had done. Foote remembers his own childhood as ordinary, in the sense that he was serene and happy in a familial environment of absolute security.

Foote admits that the one thing he missed during his childhood was sufficient time to spend with his younger brothers. When he left home at the age of sixteen, to pursue an acting career, Tom was only ten years old and John, eight. The differences in their ages meant that they shared few common interests and experiences, but this seems not to have affected their love for one another. Foote contends that they were extremely close yet totally different in nature. While Horton enjoyed listening to his family's endless talk or reading books, his brothers found excitement elsewhere. John Speed was a gifted athlete and preferred baseball to the details of family history. He also loved country-western music; and as a child, he would "sit by the radio for hours listening to his favorite country singers and instrumentalists, tapping his foot and pretending to play one of the band instruments, a guitar, a violin, or a banjo" ("Seeing and Imagining" 66).

Horton felt closer to Tom growing up because they were nearer in age. Tom is remembered as the most handsome of the three brothers and the most popular, especially with the young girls of Wharton. Nan Outlar, the playwright's cousin, recalls that he was also "the most conceited," and she paints a humorous but revealing picture of the young boy: "When Tom and John were young, they liked to sit on the large front porch that surrounded their house. Neighbors who passed by would often comment, 'You look so much alike,

wouldn't it have been nice if you had been born twins.' With childlike honesty, Tom would always answer: 'Well, yes, if we could've both looked like me'" (Outlar interview, 18 Nov. 1988). Like his older brother, Tom became interested in the theatre at a young age and later joined Horton in New York to pursue an acting career.

Foote admits that there was competition between brothers. Since he had been the only son for five years prior to Tom's birth, it was natural for him to develop what he has called "a terrible sibling problem" (Foote interview, 18 Nov. 1988). Horton was a territorial child who felt quite comfortable as the center of his family's attention, and he did not want that to change. Although inevitably forced to share the limelight, throughout his life Foote retained his position of favorite nephew and grandson.

During his formative years Foote was exceptionally close to his mother, whom he describes as "a woman of great dignity" (Foote interview, 18 Nov. 1988). She had a perceptive and deep-rooted social sense, and she could always make people of any social background feel at home. She dressed quietly, was soft-spoken, knew first hand the perils of the world, yet "never complained or burdened anyone with her fears or grief" (Foote interview, 18 Nov. 1988). She was honest with her children, and time after time she revealed through her actions that courage was one of life's most important virtues. In many ways, Foote

characterized his mother when he commented on the type of women who populate his plays: "I'm struck by these women who have very little in possessions but have great dignity, even though they've married young and often have to raise children alone. I write them from a sense of appreciation and admiration. They can be very confident, though they've certainly been given more than their share of difficult problems to work out. All [they ask] for [are] certain moments of gentleness or respite. [They have] a sense of appreciation for what [they have]; it's nothing to do with grandness or largeness, but just thanks for a nice day" (qtd. in Sterritt 38).

Remembered as a loving but stern mother, Hallie taught her children the importance of fine manners, respect for elders, and devotion to family. She seems also to have passed along to her eldest son Horton a love of music and enthusiasm for reading. Hallie was a talented musician who served as pianist and organist for the Methodist Church and she taught music lessons to supplement the family income. Horton adored listening to the sounds of his mother's piano; and with her guidance, he learned to sing scores of religious hymns at a young age. But the music he enjoyed most was the sentimental popular music his mother played in the evenings while she and his father sang. They performed such favorites as "Good Night Mr. Elephant," "My Sweetheart's the Man in the Moon," and "After the Ball."

Foote fondly recalls that before and after singing his father's favorite song "Hello Central Give Me Heaven," his father would tell "how he had heard Chauncy Alcott sing that song at the Wharton Opera House" and always end his story with the phrase, "When he had finished, there wasn't a dry eye in the house" ("Seeing and Imagining" 6).

Horton also enjoyed hearing his mother read aloud; and under her tutelage, he became an avid reader by the age of six. The books he liked best and remembers most vividly from that time are Dickens' David Copperfield, Galsworthy's The Forsyte Saga, Arnold Bennett's The Old Wives Tales, and Maya de la Roche's Jalna books. The novels that fired his imagination most were Mark Twain's Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn. He also developed an interest in Willa Cather's novels, but Foote remembers that Voltaire's Candide drew disapproval from a friend of his mother who warned that "such books were unwholesome" and that he "shouldn't be allowed to own them" ("Seeing and Imagining" 14). Hallie later told her son about her friend's objection, but she never tried to stop him from reading that or any other book.

Horton also became familiar with Biblical literature. Hallie, a dedicated Christian who had grown up in a family of devout Methodists, knew the Bible stories, and young Horton heard them both at church and at home. He learned about the holy crusaders of antiquity from Abraham to Paul, about Jesus as refuge and healer, and about the great

universal family. He has always loved Bible stories: "To me the Bible is a wonderful storytelling device that explains much about the family. From the word go Cain killed Abel, stole his birthright, and it took years before there was forgiveness" (Foote interview, 12 March 1988). But when asked about his religious views, Foote is always reticent: "I am very religious, but really don't like to get into that because it would give you the wrong idea. I don't ever really write from that point of view. I say I am religious because I am deeply religious. Yes, I am. But, um, it would never occur to me to proselytize" (qtd. in Barr and Wood 232). Although Foote's thoughts on the subject of religion remain unspoken, people who know him well say that he is a man who lives Christianity rather than one who preaches any particular religious dogma. Certainly through his mother's quiet show of faith and her recounting of favorite Bible stories, Foote was offered a set of moral and spiritual principles that remain a dominant part of his character.

Foote contends that he was never as close to his father as he was to his mother. His father's clothing business kept him away from home as many as twelve hours each day, permitting little time in which to build a firm father/son relationship. In his dissertation, "The Ordinary World of Horton Foote," Terry Barr assumes that Horton Sr.'s absence from the family colored his son's view of the father figure

since many of Foote's plays depict either fatherless families or families where the father or husband works all day and falls asleep at night (8-9). But Foote apparently never felt abandoned by his father:

> Growing up without a father was a constant experience in my family. I think it was almost a fear for me and I always wondered what it would be like if I had lived through the hardships that my father experienced as a child. What would happen if I lost my father? I think that's what happens to a child. No, I never felt neglected. I admit that I wasn't as close to my father as I was my mother but I always felt very nurtured by him. I remember that during the Depression he would come home after a day's work, enter the house, see me and my bother in bed, and then get such a look of panic on his face. He would say that he felt like re-opening the store just to make sure that we were taken care of. In that sense he was gone a great deal but I was with him, often. (Foote interview, 18 Nov. 1988)

Foote recalls that his father was remote and moody at times, but this seems to have been the by-product of his concern for the family's welfare. Wharton's economy was at its lowest ebb during the Depression, and his father often earned no more than $2.50 a day. But while businesses were being closed at a record pace, Foote survived as a shopkeeper through support of local blacks. This, of course, raised suspicions about his racial loyalties, but few Whartonians understood the whole story. There were many childhood experiences that haunted the man in his adult years, not the least of which was growing up without a proper family. Shortly after his father died and his mother abandoned him, Albert Horton Foote spent a year working in a plantation store where he became acquainted with an elderly

black couple who managed the estate. Since the boy wanted so much to belong to a family, he grew to love them dearly. He worked beside them, slept in the same room with them, and as the playwright revealed, his father "enjoyed their company so much that when Christmas holidays came round he refused to return home" (Foote interview, 18 Nov. 1988). The boy's experiences marked the beginnings of a life-long affinity for Wharton's Negro citizens, and he eventually became their trusted ally. Horton Foote explains that his father was a remarkably individualistic man:

> He preferred black customers over white customers and he would give credit to black families but not to whites. He believed that the blacks would work off the credit while the whites wouldn't. I remember as many as thirty-five black people lined up patiently waiting to visit with him. He often served as an amateur lawyer and broker for them and because half of them couldn't read or write, he would always help them. They trusted him and he constantly received letters of praise from them that began with the greeting, 'Dear One'." (Foote interview, 18 Nov. 1988)

Foote's teenage years were spent in closer communication with his father and the people of Wharton. He spent Saturdays and summers working at the haberdashery, which not only created a strong bond between father and son but opened the young man's eyes to the life around him. A child in a Southern community like Wharton lived close to every kind and level of people. He was intimate, whether on friendly terms or not, with Negroes of all ages and both sexes, with redneck boys, and the sons of aristocrats. He also ran headlong into dealings with adults of every

description. Errands took him into the homes of the washerwoman and the carpenter, the judge and the doctor, and he roamed the community at will, up and down all its alleys and avenues. He heard and saw all that could be seen and heard, and like children everywhere, he stored up lore, questions and answers, gossip and knowledge, against the coming of his adult years. Since he had the sensitivity which would make him an artist, Horton absorbed more than other children, questioned more, and reacted more strongly to the growth and decay around him. It was while working in his father's store that young Foote witnessed first hand the ways of the folk:

> When I was eleven I began to work in my father's store most afternoons after school, all day Saturday and all day, everyday, during the summer months. Business was usually slow except on Saturdays, and even then once the Depression had started and cotton was ten cents a pound, there were long stretches without customers. My father had a men's store and he sold men's hats, shirts, underwear, socks, suits, and various accessories. His customers were mostly male blacks, their wives and girl friends. We had, however, many white visitors during the day, relatives or friends of my father's, lawyers, fellow merchants, and planters who lived in town and visited their farms once or twice a week to see that the tenants weren't cheating them. I saw all kinds of people in my Daddy's store. I saw country people and lost people. I saw blacks who were unable to write their name or unable to pay more than $1.50 down for a suit. They just broke my heart. I have an enormous sense of that and I was always touched by them. I remember working in the store and old men would come in bored with nothing to do and my father would say to me, 'don't leave me alone with them or I'll jump out of my skin.' They'd stay most of the day and just sit and talk and talk and spit. Since business was anything but brisk I found myself listening. They took me into an entirely different world than I was used to. They talked of weather,

> of the crops and the prospects of crops. They got into political arguments. Even on the busiest Saturdays I had time to listen as most of the black and occasional white farmers wanted my father to wait on them. I stood by to wrap packages, or get change for my father listening to their country speech and voices and their stories again of weather and crops, of illnesses or hard times their friends were undergoing or their personal tragedies. There was laughter, too, teasing and joking. I learned to love these people, to look forward to Saturdays and to hear their voices and accents so different from my family's and to listen to their stories. I learned a lot about those kind of people. (Foote interview, 18 Nov. 1988)

Certainly, the bond between Foote and his father strengthened during this time as the youth began to realize the many demands of his father's job and the kindness he showed to other, less fortunate people. His father never sheltered him from knowing about the dark side of life; and because of this, Foote carried into manhood a full sense of the culture, personalities, and crises which typified and dramatized his hometown. He also carried a deep respect for his father and an understanding of the emotional ups and downs that were a part of this turbulent time. Foote remembers that when the store closed each Saturday evening about eleven, he and his father would go to a nearby restaurant, order a dozen fried oysters, and talk over the day's events: "We were closer then than we had ever been and I thought that was the grandest thing that ever happened to me, eating fried oysters with my father. We would always talk about the things that happened that day. He would

sometimes be elated but more often he would be so depressed that he would cry" (Foote interview, 18 Nov. 1988).

Even as a child Foote sympathized deeply with his neighbors and relatives who were suffering from the curse of the Depression, but he was not blinded to the pleasures of the new technological marvels around him. Automobiles jammed the streets, radios blared musical rhythms, and movies played in lavish theatres. Foote admits that movie-going was his favorite pastime, and he attended the Queen Theatre on Houston Street to watch his favorite stars whenever he could:

> Talking pictures, as we called them then, had arrived during this time, and I began to go to the 'talkies' as often as I was allowed by my parents. We were even driven into Houston by my uncles and grandmother to see Al Jolson in The Singing Fool. I don't remember much about it except watching my father overcome by emotion, sobbing, as Jolson sang 'Sonny Boy' to his dying child. Afterwards, I remember, too, my father saying: 'There ought to be a law against showing pictures like that and upsetting people.' And I remember the Queen, our local movie house, being closed for a week so its sound system could be installed. The theatre was packed the night it reopened. The name of the film played that night, I believe, was Drag and its theme song was 'Weary River.' Richard Barthelmess and Lila Lee were in it, but I remember nothing in the story, only that the lady who played the piano for the silent pictures was gone, and that the theatre had been redone inside for the talkies. I knew that piano-playing lady and her son, and many years later I wrote a play in part based on my memory of her called 'Talking Pictures.' ("Seeing and Imagining" 21)

Foote's fascination with cinema grew until around the age of twelve when he woke up one morning and decided to be

an actor. He remembers that the feeling was so strong it was almost like a calling to preach:

> I remember taking walks with my parents when I was a very young boy, and we would pass the house of a Mr. Armstrong, a distinguished, white-haired gentleman, who would often be sitting on his porch; and as we would pass the house, after greeting Mr. Armstrong, my parents would always whisper, 'That's Mr. Armstrong. He had a call in the cotton fields of Mississippi to go to Texas and preach.' Now, Mr. Armstrong was a Baptist and we were at that time Methodists and Episcopalians, and so I imagined the call had come to Mr. Armstrong because he was of the Baptist faith, but my mother explained that she had heard such things happening to Methodists, too--and even to Presbyterians and Episcopalians, which at the time were the only religions represented in our little town of three thousand. I was full of questions about what 'getting a call' meant, and my mother was rather evasive in her answers, so I sensed she didn't really know, and I often wanted to ask Mr. Armstrong what it was like, but never got the courage to do so. Anyways, as it turned out, some years later, when I was twelve, I got a call, but it wasn't to preach, it was to become an actor. Now, as far as I knew then, or know now, there had never been any actors in that town, and certainly not in my family. Nor had I ever known an actor, except for seeing once a year, when the tent show came to town, the actors in that troupe who came to trade in my father's store. But as I said, I had just awakened one day with the sure knowledge that I wanted to be an actor; more, that I was going to be. Of that I hadn't the slightest doubt. ("Seeing and Imagining" 19)

When Foote announced his plan, his parents were merely amused at such a bold declaration from one so young. However, as the boy's determination strengthened with time, their amusement turned to concern. Both had serious reservations about their son entering a profession that offered such a limited chance of success. There were clashes with his father about Horton's ambitions, but in the

end neither parent refused their son his choice of careers; indeed, in his formative years Foote was given every opportunity to pursue his interest.

Around 1928, Foote's enthusiasm for the arts was bolstered by the arrival of his cousin Nan Outlar. Although there was a difference of eleven years in their ages, Foote found in Nan a close companion who understood his dream and who supported his artistic endeavors. Their bond of friendship lasted for over sixty years, until Nan's death in 1990; and in a 1986 article for the Wharton County Journal Spectator, Nan described their early experiences together:

> I came to Wharton as a bride in 1928 and lived for a year in the home of my in-laws across Richmond Road from the Tom Brooks' home. Mrs. Brooks (Daisy) was Horton's grandmother and my great aunt. The Foote and Brooks' backyards opened onto each other, so there was only a short distance between where he lived, and we saw to it that the path was well used. Since I had no pressing duties in the home of the in-laws, and since my husband was a very dedicated doctor, I had from the very beginning of my marriage a lot of spare time on my hands and was smart enough to create a separate life of my own. I think young Horton, who was then a high school student, considered me glamorous and sophisticated because I had been to New York and had actually seen plays on Broadway, and his burning desire was to become a Broadway star. We both had leanings toward the dramatic and theatrical and spent many an hour looking at movie magazines and discussing stars of the cinema. We had lots of other things we enjoyed doing together--like riding bicycles, drinking Cokes at Outlar Drugs, doing the Charleston and Black Bottom, participating in Wharton Little Theatre affairs, and making 'Dagwood' sandwiches in my kitchen after Bolton and I moved into an apartment, and later when we built the home in which I still live. I certainly understood, admired and encouraged his desire to become an actor instead of the more prosaic plan his family probably envisioned for him--college and then returning to enter

> business with his father in a small haberdashery store on Milam St. ("Love of Writing Came Over Time" 9)

Another person who inspired the boy in those early days was his high school drama instructor Eppie Davidson. Foote still gives credit to his favorite teacher for sparking his interest in the theatre, and he speaks of her with abiding respect. Mrs. Davidson introduced her former student at a Wharton High School assembly in 1963, affectionately remembering Horton as an exceptional young actor:

> My own personal journey takes me back to a young woman just out of college, filled with a burning desire to bring the wonders of drama to the hinterlands. She was extremely lucky to have a small group of students who were just as eager and enthusiastic as she was; so they built and painted scenery, rigged up make-shift lighting, smeared on make-up, rehearsed far into the night, and did all the things that young drama enthusiasts have always done. Among this group was a fellow that no one dared turn loose with a hammer and nails or a paint brush. His talents just weren't turned in that direction. But he cheered everybody else on and they forgave him, for they knew when he got on the stage he would make the audience forget that the walls were a little crooked, the paint smeared, the moustache lop-sided, or that the telephone didn't ring on time. Perhaps one of his most masterful performances was in the opening scene of "Square Crooks," the junior class play, a "comedy-drama" popular then. When the curtain raised--it was the old roll-up kind with a heavy pole at the bottom--a young man was revealed asleep in bed, with his bare foot stuck out toward the audience. Since the stage was shallow, he had to ease his foot out after the curtain cleared the bed. Everything went as scheduled until the curtain almost reached the top. Then, wham! The rope slipped, the curtain fell, and the heavy pole hit the floor with a thunderous bang. Miraculously the bare foot jerked back just in time and today Horton is still able to stand on two feet. More plays followed and when Horton played the lead in the one-act play entered in the State's One-Act-

> Play contest, he was named best actor of the tournament. ("Speech to Wharton High School")

After graduating from high school in early summer of 1932, Foote felt ready for professional acting training. Horton pleaded with his parents to let him go to New York, but they were reluctant to let him take such a step; he was only sixteen years old. Hallie and Horton Sr. argued that he should attend college for at least two years. Foote refused, and so they compromised. His parents promised to send him to drama school if he would agree to wait a year and take a job. Their hope was that the boy's "madness would pass" during that time (Foote interview, 18 Nov. 1988).

That summer Horton moved to Dallas to live with his Grandmother Brooks, who had gone there to care for her two youngest sons. Mrs. Brooks encouraged her grandson's endeavors, and Foote quickly enrolled in the Woodrow School of Expression where he studied drama and elocution. He also secured a job as an usher at the Majestic Theatre, one of the city's largest movie houses, where he spent most of his time "watching the current movies over and over" (Foote interview, 18 Nov. 1988).

Horton returned to Wharton in May of 1933 at which time his parents agreed that he could attend acting school, but not in New York. His father told him that he would be attending California's famed Pasadena Playhouse in the fall. Years later Foote explained that the Pasadena Playhouse was

not chosen for him because of its superior methods of teaching but, rather, for his safety and protection: "Pasadena, they felt, would be a more wholesome atmosphere for a young man away from his family for the first time." ("Seeing and Imagining" 24)

Although Foote contends that his father was generally strict with him, it was Horton Sr.'s generosity that ultimately enabled the boy to pursue his chosen vocation. By the time Horton was ready to begin drama school, his parents were experiencing financial troubles. During 1932 and 1933, the height of America's most serious and devastating depression, banks had failed, the stock market plummeted, the savings of many people had been wiped out, and homes and farms were being foreclosed in Wharton at a rapid pace. At the end of most weekdays, the cash register in his father's store registered as little as two dollars, and Horton Sr. was forced to renew a bank loan he had taken out years before to provide for the family. Foote admits that at that time all he could think of was going to California to become an actor. He was not aware that his father might be unable to find the money for his tuition. Years later he became aware of his father's sacrifice: "At the time I was ready to begin acting school at the Pasadena Playhouse, my father owned an old Colonial house which he had held on to for many years. All that he ever owned was that house. On the day he sold the house he was asked to

join an oil pool with a group of friends; but instead of investing it, he sold it to pay my tuition. The oil pool was a successful one and made all of its participants wealthy; but if my father ever had regrets, he never burdened me with them" (Foote interview, 18 Nov. 1988). Later, when the young man finally headed for New York and his first professional acting job, his father helped him once again. However, as Foote remembers, his father laid down certain conditions:

> My father had a terror that I would turn out like my uncles and so he was very strict on me. I think in his heart that he felt my grandmother was somehow responsible for the way her sons turned out, that she had made life too easy for them, and he didn't want to make the same mistake with me. I can't say that because I could always go to my grandmother for help, but I think my father believed it. When I was ready to leave for New York he gave me fifty dollars and said don't come back for more because there isn't any. At the time, I thought he was very stern for saying this; I just didn't appreciate all the sacrifices my father made for me. (Foote interview, 18 Nov. 1988)

Foote's appreciation would later be revealed through his many fictive characters who often make sacrifices to enable someone they love to fulfill their dreams.

Horton Foote said goodbye to his family in September 1933. His parents agreed that he and his mother would drive to Houston in his grandmother's car where he would catch a bus to California. Foote recalls that his departure was an emotional time for everyone:

> I remember the day, early in September, as a day of brilliant sunshine. I don't remember telling my father or my brothers goodbye; they, of course, were in school, and he had gone down to the store long before my departure, but I do remember my Grandmother Brooks standing in her front yard crying as she waved goodbye to me. There was even a more depressing scene at the Houston Bus Station. Here my Aunt Lily, my father's sister, and his mother were waiting to see me off on the bus. My Big Mama cried as if I were leaving to be executed, sobbed so loudly that her daughter had to lead her away for a spell to comfort her. My mother kept her emotions under control until after I had boarded the bus and we were pulling out of the station. I turned to wave goodbye and I saw her crying, too, as she waved farewell. ("Seeing and Imagining" 27)

The trip to California took three days and two nights. Foote admits that the ride was very exciting since he "had never been out of the state of Texas or any farther away from home than Houston." He saw sights he had never seen before--deserts, mountains, orange groves--and he heard the voices of friendly but unfamiliar people as they boarded the bus. Yet beneath his excitement lay feelings of sadness and homesickness that would grow stronger with time ("Seeing and Imagining" 28).

Horton was greeted at the Los Angeles bus station by his Great Aunt Mag, his Grandmother Brook's sister, and her husband Walt. The young man had been assured that he would live with his relatives until he could find a permanent place of his own; however, he was disappointed to learn that his aunt and uncle had reserved a room for him at the Pasadena YMCA:

> I was very disappointed as I'd fully expected to spend the weekend with them, and I had mentally made

> a list of places I would like to see: Grauman's Chinese Theatre and the hand prints of movie stars on the pavement in front of the theatre; the movie studios and houses of movie stars. Later, when I did visit them for a weekend, I think I understood why they hadn't asked me to stay. He was out of work. This happened frequently because of his drinking, and they were living, temporarily they assured me, in a very modest tourist court, and I suspect they were at the moment ashamed for me to see them in such circumstances, not wanting me to tell my Texas family how they were forced to live. ("Seeing and Imagining" 31)

Foote spent the next several days alone, the first time he had ever been alone in his life, writing optimistic letters to his parents and taking brief walks to look at the Pasadena Playhouse. He had a great deal of time to think, but as he confessed years later: "I was in truth lonely and scared" ("Seeing and Imagining" 31). He longed in his heart for the dusty cotton fields of Texas: "On Saturday night as I sat in my small room at the Y, I thought of my father's store always busy, even in Depression times. I thought of the black and white farmers who would be coming into the store, always cheerful these Saturday nights, even when there was little money. It was also the time when cotton pickers and their families flooded the county and swelled the always crowded Saturday night streets. But lonely or not, I knew somehow I would never fully go back to that life again" ("Seeing and Imagining" 32).

CHAPTER 2
BECOMING A WRITER

> When I was growing up in Wharton, I had no idea of becoming a writer; I was determined to be an actor. And yet, now, looking back, I can see that in some subtle, mysterious way, my talent, such as it is, was being nurtured for my future work. (Foote interview, 18 Nov. 1988)

In 1933, Horton Foote was a seventeen-year-old drama student at the Pasadena Playhouse with aspirations of becoming a movie star. His boyish ambition was to see "his name in bright lights on a Hollywood marquee," a dream that he never realized as an actor (Foote interview, 18 Nov. 1988). Ten years later, he was one of the most promising young writers on the theatrical horizon, the author of four plays produced in Off-Broadway and Broadway theatres, and a resident playwright with the prestigious American Actors Company in New York. His career was suddenly launched in a direction he had never dreamed of and from which he has not strayed for over half a century. The process by which Horton Foote became a playwright, while by no means accidental, was largely the result of the convergence of his desire to be an actor with the force of circumstance.

The Pasadena Playhouse was a unique place for Foote to pursue a career in the movies. Founded in 1916 by the young actor Gilmor Brown and his small stock company, the Playhouse was an outgrowth of enthusiasm for amateur theatre that had swept across America in the 1920s. In 1928, Brown organized the Pasadena Community Playhouse Association (made

up of amateurs and a sprinkling of professionals), built a handsome mission-style building with a theatre that seated more than seven hundred people, and opened the Pasadena Playhouse School of Theatre. By the time Foote arrived there in 1933, the Playhouse was recognized as one of America's foremost community theatres, praised for its unique productions of classic works by Shaw, Moliére, Shakespeare, and the Greeks, and considered a stepping stone to a career in nearby Hollywood.

In his essay "Pasadena and Beyond," Foote recalls that the school impressed upon its beginning students the importance of a practical education: "Training is not confined in theory. Students learn by doing! Assistant direction, costuming, stage managing, scene designing, even the actual construction and painting of settings, and the work of stage crews" (33). While this philosophical statement meant nothing to Foote initially, he quickly discovered that acting was only a small part of what he was expected to learn. He took classes in fencing, eurythmics, diction, costume design, makeup, scene design, theatre literature, styles of acting, and play rehearsal. He studied diligently and worked hard, but even Gilmore Brown's weekly inspirational talks about what a rewarding life the theatre could be if one had the proper dedication did not keep the young man from feeling discouraged with the training he was to receive there.

Classes were not a happy time for him. Since he had no talent for drawing, he accomplished little in either costume or stage design; even play rehearsals were frustrating. Within days after school began, Foote was thrust into a Roman comedy and told he had six weeks of rehearsal after which time he and his fellow students would perform the play without props, scenery, or costumes. The young man had read very few plays, was not aware of Roman comedies, and knew nothing about the manner in which to properly perform the role. He admits that "the director was bored with the play and with us. He put us on our feet the first day and watched as we stumbled about the stage, not knowing how in the world to approach this material and afraid that we didn't understand a word of it" ("Pasadena and Beyond" 35). To make matters worse, Horton was told that if he expected to become a successful actor, he would have to correct his Southern accent: "I soon realized that I came from a part of the world that was sort of looked down on by more sophisticated people. I became ashamed of where I came from and I began to learn to speak the English language" (Foote interview, 18 Nov. 1988).

Foote used his lunch money to pay for private speech lessons that he hoped would eradicate his regional accent. The teacher, Blanche Townsend, listened to him read dramatic monologues an hour each week and taught him how to use the phonetic alphabet. She appears to have been a very

encouraging teacher, which was something Horton desperately needed at the time, but her training techniques were somewhat antiquated. Foote recalls that when he began to study the role of Hamlet, he asked Miss Townsend for help: "She would only hear me do 'Speak the speech, I pray you' and I had to say 'trippingly on the tongue' over and over. It almost ruined Shakespeare for me forever" ("Pasadena and Beyond" 37).

Foote rehearsed Shakespearean monologues day and night, often oblivious to the people around him: "My Grandmother Brooks came to California to visit two of her sisters. She thought the boarding house I was living in not suitable and so she took rooms for us in Orange Grove, a very expensive part of the city. There was a lovely garden in back of the house and I used to go out there after dinner and practice my diction exercises. One night a man from next door called out in the dark: 'Are you ill?' 'No sir,' I said. 'I'm just practicing my diction exercises.' 'Well,' he said, 'cut that out. This is a respectable neighborhood'" ("Pasadena and Beyond" 37-38). When the young man returned to Wharton that summer, he met consternation of a different sort. His brother Tom charged twenty-five cents to his friends just to hear Horton talk in "the most outrageous English accent you've ever heard in your life" (Foote interview, 18 Nov. 1988). Foote soon came to the realization that no matter how hard he was trying to speak English, roles in Roman or

Shakespearean drama were too intimidating for a seventeen-year-old Texan.

The only class that Foote seems to have enjoyed that semester was theatre literature. This was partly due to his fascination with drama but also because the instructor took a special interest in him. Foote remembers his teacher was passionate about plays as literature, knowledgeable about the stage conventions of the Greeks, the Romans, the Elizabethans, Moliére, the Noh plays, and the Chinese theatre, and always willing to spend time with him after class to talk about novels, poetry, or short stories. But vastly more important than classes to the playwright's development were the stage productions he saw at the Playhouse: Sidney Howard's Alien Corn, Lynn Riggs' Road Side, Moliére's Bourgeois Gentilhomme, and Oscar Wilde's Salome (starring Lee J. Cobb), to name only a few. Foote admits that the plays were performed with great originality, but none of them affected him like Eva Le Gallienne's performances in Ibsen's Hedda Gabler and The Master Builder, which she brought on tour to the west coast:

> Eva Le Gallienne was announced that winter [1933] to bring three plays of Ibsen to the Biltmore Theatre in Los Angeles. John Forsht and my knowledgeable theatre friends were all excited over the event. I had never heard of her or the Civic Repertory she had founded in New York City, but I pretended I had and I listened to all they had to say about her. I asked my grandmother if she would take me for my birthday. We took the Inter-urban into Los Angeles for the Saturday matinee performance of Hedda Gabler. They set the play in the late twenties and I will never forget

> Le Gallienne's entrance, her hair bobbed, wearing a short skirt and smoking a cigarette. She was extraordinary, I thought, in the part, and the play made a deep and lasting impression on me. My grandmother sensed this, I'm sure, and she asked if I'd like to see the evening performance of The Master Builder. I did, of course, and that night I saw my second Ibsen play, and with Le Gallienne in the lead. I have seen many plays and many fine productions since, but none have made the kind of lasting impression on me that these first Ibsen plays did. ("Pasadena and Beyond" 38)

Foote's experience at the Biltmore Theatre, witnessing the moving scenes of people in distress, was his first encounter with modern theatrical realism. After seeing the productions, he suddenly lost the urge to pursue a film career; his childhood calling to be a movie star was replaced with an overwhelming desire to become a stage actor, a dream that would eventually lead him to New York and the American Actors Company.

Foote's final year at the Pasadena Playhouse was more successful than the first had been. He became more confident of his talents and more determined to learn as much as he could about stage acting. He and his classmates were put in charge of the Recital Hall Theatre. As seniors, each was cast in four plays and expected to build scenery and costumes, procure properties, and act as stage hands and stage managers for the shows. Foote remembers that his responsibilities were demanding, but educational:

> I was first cast as Earnest in Oscar Wilde's The Importance of Being Earnest, and I went from that to building and painting scenery, working all night some nights, stage managing or assisting Miss Scott in her directing. I don't know how

> good we were at any of it, but most of us tried very hard and we were certainly better carpenters and stage managers and prop men at the end than when we started. There was grumbling, of course, from some people who felt they had come to study acting, which meant they wanted to act all the time, and not to learn to build scenery or stage manage or work props. Miss Scott took a liking to me and she urged me to learn all the technical skills I could. She had gone to New York, she said, to be an actress and one needed all the skills one could get to survive. ("Pasadena and Beyond" 40-41)

Foote's hard work and pleasant temperament quickly drew the attention of his superiors. Miss Townsend, the diction coach, taught in a summer school connected with the Rice Players, a stock company on Martha's Vineyard Island in Massachusetts. That summer she decided to hire three young actors from Pasadena to work with her students. For their services, they would be given room and board, a few dollars a week for spending money, and the opportunity to perform bit roles in summer stock productions. Horton and his best friend, John Forsht, were invited to participate. The third actor hired was Joseph Anthony, a graduate of the Pasadena Playhouse, who was considered by many to be the most gifted actor that the theatre had produced. In time, Anthony would become an important Broadway director and one of Foote's most cherished friends and colleagues. In the summer of 1935, they were both struggling young actors hoping to break into the professional theatre.

Foote's California experience had helped him land his first acting job; but after two years at the Pasadena

Playhouse, he was still confused about the style of acting for which he was best suited. He had grown to appreciate the works of Shakespeare and the Greeks but felt uncomfortable performing them. Ibsen and Chekhov were new to him, and very few American plays were being produced with regularity across the country. It was not until 1935, while working at Martha's Vineyard, that Foote became aware of his potential as a Southern-born actor.

That summer Miss Townsend decided to produce Paul Green's play No 'Count Boy, which tells the story of a young black boy who dreams of leaving his family and home to travel the world. There were no black actors in Martha's Vineyard and as Foote remembers: "In those days black actors and white actors simply did not work together, eat together in restaurants, or sit together in the audience" ("Pasadena and Beyond" 42). Miss Townsend chose to produce the play with an all white cast and selected Horton for the lead role, a part that the young man did not have to write out phonetically. He had been around provincial blacks all his life and was very knowledgeable about their customs, the way they spoke, and how they acted. Foote remembers that the production was a huge success: "The theatre was packed and I'm sure not many of our audiences had ever seen a play about blacks. I haven't read No 'Count Boy in a long time and don't know what I'd think about it today, but then, for me and the audience, it was a welcome relief from the usual

summer stock Broadway play with its hoked-up situations and unreal characters" ("Pasadena and Beyond" 42-43). Foote's performance in No 'Count Boy had little effect on his future as a Broadway actor; nevertheless, the experience created in him an awareness of the unique qualities and inherent potentialities of his cultural background. He had found an idiom he was more at home with than Shakespeare, and later, he would draw on the Southern folk tradition for inspiration in writing his own plays.

In the fall of 1935, Horton Foote decided to try his luck in New York. He had been instructed by the professional actors on Martha's Vineyard about the proper procedures to follow when looking for work; and as Foote admits, the phrase "making the rounds" quickly became as familiar to him as it was to the more experienced actors in the city:

> It meant arriving in the Broadway district around ten in the morning when the agents' and producers' offices were beginning to open, and going up and down Broadway and the side streets from 39th Street to 57th Street, and asking the receptionists of the agents and producers if any casting was being done that day. If the answer was yes, then came the next question: Is there a part for me? If the answer to that was no, you then went on to the next office; if the answer was yes or maybe, then you took a seat and waited, sometimes as long as five hours, for someone higher up to come out, look you over, and then you would find out if the receptionist's response had been the right one, or whether there would be a curt 'not right.' Sometimes there would be no comment at all, just a negative shake of the head. ("Pasadena and Beyond" 44)

Foote arose faithfully every morning, put his nickel in the subway slot, and called on the offices of Arthur Hopkins, Guthrie McClintic, Crosby Gaige, Oscar Serlin, Max Gordon, Herman Shumlin, the Theatre Guild, William Brady, the Shubert brothers, Brock Pemberton, and Alfred Deliagre, to name only a few. Except for an occasional job as a fourteenth century scissors grinder in an industrial film or a prop boy for a musical revue at the Provincetown Playhouse, he had little success finding theatrical employment. Foote remembers that during this period he would get desperately discouraged because he had set himself a near impossible goal of becoming a Broadway actor by the age of twenty-two: "We do terrible things to ourselves. Imagine this twenty-year-old child worrying about being a Broadway star at twenty-two. But all around me, I'd see people who were forty and forty-five, who weren't Broadway stars and having a tough time, and that put the fear of God in me" (Foote interview, 18 Nov. 1988).

Foote's first year in New York was as rootless and displaced a time as he had ever felt. To say he struggled would be an understatement. In whatever job he took, he worked long and hard, while remaining dedicated to his craft; but Wharton, Texas, was never far from his mind. His mother wrote him letters every day, often relating the events of a complete day in the life of his family and friends. Foote remembers that "she wrote as if I had just

left the day before," and in his lonely hours he "would read them over and over" (Foote interview, 18 Nov. 1988). He often went hungry, and were it not for his job as a busboy at a New York restaurant he would have had hardly anything to eat at all. On many occasions after the restaurant closed, he would collect the leftover food, take it to his apartment, and feed his starving actor friends. His mother's letters described in great detail the meals she had prepared: "Since food was always excellently prepared in our house and in the houses of all our relatives, her descriptions of their meals made me ravenously hungry. I had to write and ask her to stop those descriptions, as I often had little money for food and the food available after reading her description seemed almost inedible" ("Pasadena and Beyond" 50).

However, in spite of his crippling budget, Foote found a way to attend the theatre: "I soon learned to look about the house for empty seats in more expensive sections and at intermission, if still vacant, would claim one of them as my own. I also learned from my fellow actors when completely broke to wait outside the theatre until the first intermission, mingle with the audience out for a smoke or a breath of fresh air, and then walk nonchalantly in with them when the intermission was over, stand in the back until the lights were down and then scurry to an empty seat" ("Pasadena and Beyond" 48). The productions he remembers

most vividly are: Lillian Hellman's The Children's Hour at the Maxine Elliot Theatre, and Owen and Donald Davis' dramatization of Edith Wharton's Ethan Frome. Foote admits that Pauline Lord's performance as Zenobia in Ethan Frome changed his outlook on the art of acting:

> It was January of 1936 that I went to see [her] in Ethan Frome with Raymond Massey and Ruth Gordon. I don't remember with what good fortune I was able to buy an orchestra seat for this play, but I do remember sitting there from the beginning, and that from that moment the fragile but overpowering figure of Miss Lord appeared on the stage, I was transformed; and it made me from then on dissatisfied with much of the acting in our theatre. By what magic she accomplished what she did, I wasn't, and am still not, sure, but I felt that the life that day she brought to the stage, and the truth and beauty of it, made most other acting trivial and unimportant. ("Pasadena and Beyond" 48)

Foote's career took a turn for the better in the winter of 1936 when he encountered Rosamand Pinchot. He had met the actress two years before when she performed in a production of John Brown's Body at the Pasadena Playhouse. Pinchot explained that she was studying acting with Tamara Daykarhanova, a distinguished protegee of Konstantin Stanislavski, at her School for the Stage and needed an acting partner. If Foote was interested, she would pay for the cost of the lessons. Since job prospects were bleak, the young man jumped at the chance to learn more about his craft. Foote was unaware of it at the time, but the training and the friendships he was to develop there would

greatly influence his writing. In his essay "Pasadena and Beyond" Foote describes the school:

> The School for the Stage was at 29 West 59th Street on the sixth floor of a long narrow building, and where I was to spend a great part of each day for the next three years. There were three acting teachers at the School: Tamara Daykarhanova, Vera Soloviova, and Andrius Jilinski. Daykarhanova had been the leading lady with Balief's 'Chauve Souris' that had been formed in Russia, and had had great success in subsequent American and European tours. The company had disbanded some years before and Daykarhanova and her husband, Sergei Vassilief, stayed on in America. She had been associated with Maria Ouspenskaya in her school, and when Ouspenskaya left New York for Hollywood, she began her own acting studio, asking Jilinsky and Soloviova to join her. Jilinsky and Soloviova were married, and had been members of the Moscow Art Theatre. Soloviova had replaced the original Nina in The Sea Gull and had performed it many times at the Art Theatre, and had originated the part of the blind girl in Stanislavski's production of Dickens' Cricket in the Hearth. Jilinsky, too, had played roles at the Art Theatre, but his career had been interrupted by the First World War and the Revolution. On his return they were for a time both members of the Second Studio, and after their marriage Jilinsky was invited by the Lithuanian Government to head their State Theatre, and he and Soloviova were there for several years. Michael Chekov, one of the world's great actors and Anton's nephew, had, in the meantime, left Russia and started a theatre in Paris. He asked Jilinsky and Soloviova to join him and they toured with Chekov over Europe and finally in America. Their company disbanded here, too, and they both decided to remain and work with Daykarhanova. (51)

Foote first met Soloviova and Daykarhanova after performing a scene from Shaw's Candida. He remembers that when he and Pinchot had finished their presentation, Soloviova and Daykarhanova conferred for several minutes in Russian; and then Daykarhanova, who spoke the clearer

English, began the criticism by asking him where he had trained and what parts he had played:

> I told them as best I could how I had trained, and they shook their heads and looked doleful. My heart sank. Then they said that I was not without talent, but that I had had the wrong kind of training--that if I continued working as I did, I would get into very bad acting patterns that would take me years to overcome and that they would suggest that I also take technique classes with Jilinsky, but in the meantime I could continue in the scene class and they would help me as much as they could. They then gave us specific criticism about the scene; I heard, to me, the strange words, beats and colors for the first time. I went away thoroughly confused, but sensed somehow this was a place I could learn something of value. ("Pasadena and Beyond" 53)

Foote learned even more about acting from Andrius Jilinsky, whom he describes as a "thorough and rigid taskmaster" ("Pasadena and Beyond" 53). Jilinsky was an early pioneer in what would later become known as the "Stanisklavsky method" of acting. His techniques, based on his studies with Stanislavky, Vaktangov and the Second Studio, and Michael Chekov, are commonplace today; but in the 1930s, they were considered new and revolutionary. Jilinsky's approach to acting was unconventional, deeply felt, psychologically detailed, and more impulsive and openly emotional than the English and French styles prevalent at the time. He emphasized psychological truthfulness in the portrayal of characters, concentration on inner feelings, and a simple true-to-life manner of moving and speaking, while drilling his students in concentration, relaxation, sensory recall, and

improvisational exercises. These new methods signaled the beginning of a revolt in the American Theatre: "Those of us who became dedicated to this way of work felt we were in all ways turning our backs on the past. When I heard Jilinsky say that all good actors know instinctively what he was trying to teach us, and that Pauline Lord, Laurette Taylor, and Walter Huston, whether they were aware of it or not, worked this way, I was willing to make any sacrifice to try and learn too" ("Pasadena and Beyond" 54).

Method-trained actors were exactly what the fresh generation of American realist playwrights such as Eugene O'Neill and Clifford Odets had been waiting for, and they constituted the only American School of acting during the 1930s. Having found a system of training that was useful to him, Foote honed his acting talents under Jilinsky's careful instruction. More importantly, Foote's training at the School for the Stage gave him a special confidence in the impact that good acting can have on drama, a fact that would later influence his style of writing.

The three years that Foote spent at the Studio were relatively free of the kind of frustrations he had felt at the Pasadena Playhouse. However, disappointments of a different sort emerged. He had little time to look for acting jobs and desperately needed a means by which to support himself. For a while, he worked as an usher and barker at a movie house on Forty-second Street, where he

took tickets and marched in front of the marquee crying out the names of current movies. He even tried to work a second summer at Martha's Vineyard but found the acting there so different from what he was being taught at Daykarhanova's that he was unable to complete his contract. Then in the fall of 1937, Foote was approached by Warner Brothers to do a small part in a play called Swing Your Lady. This was his first real taste of Broadway, but his experience was not a pleasant one:

> Since my part was only in the one scene, I wasn't called to rehearsal until the day my scene was to be rehearsed. I arrived not knowing any of the actors, or what the play was about. I was called on stage and was told when and where to move and that was all. I became as panicked as I had been in those first weeks in Pasadena--I froze. I couldn't remember lines, I couldn't hear cues. In those days, and I suppose still today, Equity allows a management to rehearse an actor five days free. If at the end of that period they want you to continue, your contract goes into effect and you go on salary. At the end of the fourth day the stage manager called me aside and said, 'You are going to be replaced.' I was humiliated. Not only would I have to go back to the studio and tell them I had been fired from a job they wouldn't have wanted me to take in the first place, but I had the regretable habit of writing extremely optimistic letters to my parents back in Wharton, so eager was I to reassure them that I was about to achieve success and financial security. Now I had to write them and tell them of my failure. It was a difficult letter to write, and I still feel the pain of it as I recall it here. ("Pasadena and Beyond" 58)

Foote survived his humiliating experience with Warner Brothers; and during the two years that followed (1937-1939), he secured more acting jobs than ever before. He was cast as a supernumerary in Max Rheinhardt's dramatic

spectacle The Eternal Road and Ernest Hemingway's The Fifth Column. He was hired by the Maverick Theatre in Woodstock, New York, to perform eight roles. He also toured in a patriotic musical, Yankee Doodle Comes to Town, and was cast in three one-act pieces for the One-Act Repertory Company at the Hudson Theatre: The Coggerers by Paul Vincent Carroll, The Red Velvet Coat by Josephine Nigli, and Mr. Banks of Birmingham by Jean Giraudoux. The productions received a cryptic notice from Brooks Atkinson, critic of the New York Times: "One-act plays share all the diseases common to the full-length dramas. They are not immune to prolixity, careless workmanship, and bad acting" ("Program of Three Dramas" 14:2). Foote admits that he became discouraged: "Between acting engagements I would have to find part time work, usually ushering in a movie house, and in many ways I expected this to be the pattern of the rest of my life" ("Pasadena and Beyond" 60).

What changed that expected pattern was Foote's association with Mary Hunter and the American Actors Company. Mary Hunter, the niece of the novelist Mary Austin, was a student at the School for the Stage when Foote enrolled there in 1936. When they first met, Hunter was already well known in literary and theatrical circles; her close friends included Agnes DeMille, Lynn Riggs, Franchot Tone, June Walker, Helen Westley, and Lee Strasberg. She had also been active with an experimental theatre group

during the early '30s and had developed a friendship with the novelist James T. Farrell and the famous dancer and choreographer Katherine Dunham. Over the years Hunter and Foote became close friends, and often encouraged each other's artistic endeavors. By 1938, both of them had become dissatisfied with the practices of the New York theatres. Hunter wanted to be a director; but since the commercial theatre seldom hired women for such positions, "she realized her chance for Broadway employment was dim indeed." Furthermore, as Foote explains, "we were all at Daykarhanova's being indoctrinated with the ideal of group acting. We were taught, and believed, that Broadway with its dependence on stars was ruinous to any real creativity. The Group Theatre was about to disband, but all of us at our studio felt that the group ideal was the correct one and that the failure of the Group Theatre had to do with Broadway economics as much as anything" ("Pasadena and Beyond" 61).

In 1937, Mary Hunter embarked upon a project that she hoped would give young talents a chance to work in New York and lead them out of the wilderness of commerce into the promised land of art. That winter she rehearsed a group of actors in a Clemence Dane play about the Brontë family and presented it at the studio, and the following spring she drew up plans for the creation of a permanent acting troupe, to be called the American Actors Company, that would use

Hunter's friends and fellow students as its nucleus ("Pasadena and Beyond" 62). The original members included such notables as Agnes DeMille, Jerome Robbins, Mildred Dunnock, Valerie Bettis, June Walker, Lucy Kroll, Joseph Anthony, and, of course, Horton Foote. Mary Hunter has written of this beginning in a preface to Foote's first published play, Only the Heart:

> The American Actors Theatre was founded in 1938 by a group of young theatre people for the kind of experimental development that the creative artist in every field must have and that is most difficult to achieve in the theatre, as none of its arts can be practiced in solitude. Most of the original members shared a common technical training in one of the best teaching methods in the theatre, that of the Moscow Art Theatre passed on to us by its outstanding teachers, Tamara Daykarhanova, Andrius Jilinksy, Maria Ouspenskaya, and Vera Soloviova. With this in our pockets (and very little money, I might add) we brought together a group of actors, dancers, choreographers, designers, and technicians to begin a non-profit theatre that would give a consistent chance for young talent to develop, a chance otherwise impossible to attain in the very city which is the heart of the theatre as an industry and art. (5)

Hunter explains that the main intention of the American Actors Company was "the uncovering" of their "own cultural roots, and since the members of the company represented almost a regional survey of the U.S., the sources were rich and varied" (5). After renting a small space over a garage on West 69th Street, building a stage, and installing platforms for seating, the company began rehearsing plays by established American writers such as E.P. Conkle, Paul Green, and Lynn Riggs--writers whose works seemed to

represent characteristic aspects of American life. In 1939, the troupe also began work on American Legend, a folk venue which was to feature group improvisations and the choreography of Agnes DeMille. During their rehearsals, Mary Hunter encouraged the actors to draw on their regional diversity and pool their experiences to arrive at a meaning of "American." The cast was asked to mine their memories and evoke the characters they found there, improvising dialogues between them. They wrote scenes and monologues based on real situations, dramatizing but not fabricating. The goal was not entertainment but realism. Foote found these sessions exciting and began to explore his Texan background for dramatic material. He performed an improvisation based on his family's experiences during a Texas Gulf hurricane which instantly gained the approval of Agnes DeMille. After his performance, DeMille walked up to him and casually asked, "You seem to be in touch with some interesting theatrical material. Did you ever think of writing a play?" Of course, he had not, but as her suggestion took root, he began to write down his memories of Texas.

Initially, he called the play "Gulf Storm" but soon changed the title to "Wharton Dance"; and in the fall of 1940, the American Actors Company staged the piece. Foote admits that the play was nothing short of reportage, that he used real names, and thought he was honoring everybody by

doing so: "I no longer have a copy of the play but my memory of it is that it too was very improvisational in form, based on a real situation, and using the names of the boys and girls in what was known back in high school as 'our crowd.'" The company produced the play along with one-act plays by Paul Green and Thornton Wilder. Robert Coleman, a drama critic for the New York Mirror, came to see the production and wrote favorably of the evening, particularly of Foote's play and acting. Foote recalls: "Noel Coward acting in his own plays was the vogue then. Because of Coleman's review, I was interviewed by another reporter who wrote my potential as a Texas Noel Coward. That was far from my mind, but I did want to act and I'm sure I thought that one way to get good parts was to write them for myself" ("Pasadena and Beyond" 64).

Suddenly, Foote found himself being hailed as a promising new playwright even though he knew little or nothing about writing plays. He had not admitted to himself that he wanted to be a writer; but when the company requested that he write a three-act play, he accepted the challenge. Later, he revealed that he began to feel "a certain security" about accomplishing the task before him, a security that he had never felt in all his years as an actor ("Pasadena and Beyond" 65). So in the winter of 1940, Foote boarded a bus in New York and headed for Wharton to write a new play.

When Foote arrived in Texas, he discovered a number of changes in his hometown. His Grandmother Brooks was living permanently in Houston while renting her house in Wharton, and Foote recalls that "it seemed strange not to be able to wander into her yard and house anytime day or night that I wanted to" ("Learning to Write" 68). Change had come, too, to his Grandmother Corella Davenport, who had never been in good health but had recently been diagnosed as having a terminal illness. Even though his father had never been close to her, Horton was fond of her; and the news of her declining health was unsettling to him. Unsettling, too, was the realization that many of his extended family members, the aunts and uncles that he had been close to as a child, had either died or moved to larger cities in search of more lucrative employment. His Aunts Laura and Rosa had married, and his Uncles Tom, Billy, and Speed had by this time become hopeless derelicts. His brothers had also changed; they were no longer "little boys, but young men," faced with the same questions about their futures as he had faced six years earlier ("Learning to Write" 66). Would they, after graduation, leave their hometown in search of a different kind of life or would they remain in Wharton content with what a small town could offer?

In response to the familial changes that confronted him that winter, Foote wrote "Texas Town." Unfortunately, the play is not available for study, but it was eventually

produced in 1941, and, as Foote describes it, "I set my play in a small-town drugstore. Two brothers, vastly different in temperament, were in love with the same girl. One of the brothers wanted to stay in the town and lead the most conventional life possible, and the other found life there stifling, and wanted badly to leave. There were a number of other stories involving minor characters that were explored as a kind of counterpart of the central story" ("Learning to Write" 75). Brooks Atkinson's New York Times review of the play's production provides insight into Foote's depiction of Southern small-town life:

> If 'Texas Town' does not derive from Mr. Foote's personal experiences and observations, he is remarkably inventive. For none of the parts is stock theatre, except perhaps the part he plays himself without much talent and with no originality. And it is impossible not to believe absolutely in the reality of his characters. The melancholy doctor who drinks in the back room, the hearty judge and his cronies, the bored wife who is looking for excitement, the chattering girls, the bumptious boys, the sharp edges of bad feeling that cut through the neighborhood leisure, the quick impulses of emotion, the sense of drifting without purpose of direction--these are truths of small-town life that Mr. Foote has not invented. ("American Actors Company Produces Horton Foote's 'Texas Town'" 22:3)

Atkinson also admired that a play so simply written could give a "real and languid impression of a town changing in relation to the world" (22:3). The play's small-town setting, its fixed values pitted against an ever-changing world, its array of simple but spiritually bankrupt people, and its characters' need for a sense of order and stability

in their lives, represent themes that Foote would return to in subsequent works.

The American Actors Company's performance of "Texas Town" at the Humphrey-Weidman Studio Theatre in the spring of 1941 did little for Foote's acting career but it certainly boosted his prestige as a playwright. Besides prompting the attendance of Brooks Atkinson, Lee Strasberg, and Clifford Odets, the performance also attracted the attention of a representative of the Shubert brothers, Edward Choate, who took an option on the play.

The playwright was elated about signing the contract with the Shuberts; but after further discussion with Choate, he realized he had made a mistake:

> I went to visit with him in his office in the Shubert Theatre after I had signed the option, and to my disappointment, our talk was not about the play or the productions of the American Actors Company, but a pep talk about the monetary rewards of Broadway Theatre, and how best to reach a vast audience. In order to do that, he let me know that my play would have to be greatly changed. He was very blunt and straightforward and said he was treating me like a professional Broadway writer. Today I would be equally blunt and ask why he was interested in the play at all, but I was in awe of that world of commercial power and nodded my head as if I agreed with all he was saying. In my heart, I didn't, and when later I tried to execute a few suggestions I realized that was no road for me to travel as a writer. ("Learning to Write" 78)

As little as Foote understood then about writing plays, he instinctively knew that he could never resort to formulas or fashion his work to the tastes of a producer, director,

or audience. He must continue to write about what he knew best and in his own distinct style.

In the plays that he wrote immediately following "Texas Town," Foote grew in confidence and skill. His maturity as a playwright would require years of practice and self-criticism, but his association with the American Actors Company provided a good portion of the necessary apprenticeship for a writer. In the spring of 1941, on the eve of America's involvement in World War II, Foote completed four one-act plays, which the Company presented as a single bill under the title Out of My House. All these plays depicted familial relationships and themes that he would continue to explore throughout his career. Foote began by using the name of the Texas town he was born in, but he changed it to Richmond and later, Harrison (a name taken from a once prosperous plantation community built by Burr Albert Harrison). Most of his writing life would be spent in this mythical town.

From the beginning the one-act form seemed appropriate for Foote because it did not require elaborate or sustained plot construction but permitted him to display his exceptional ability to create character through realistic dialogue. The diverse plays in Out of My House establish character types that had been prevalent in "Texas Town," and which would re-appear in other works. Thematically, Out of My House explores the disentegration of the Southern family

when young people are forced to deal with a changing class system that threatens their lives and the peacefulness of their community. The initial play, "Night After Night," set in Ted Miller's all-night restaurant during the 1920s, opens with a glimpse of the characters whose stories are to be told in more detail in the later one-acts. Among them are Minnie and Syd Bartell, a married couple who spend their nights drunkenly blaming each other for their wasted lives together; Ellen Belle Croy, an upper-class teenage snob who finds pleasure in insulting less fortunate people; Sammy and Babe Mavis, the children of a broken down aristocratic family who have returned home from school to visit their alcoholic sister; and Jack Weems, a sympathetic but confused middle-class youth who finds escape from the poverty, bitterness, and bigotry of his family and hometown in the local taverns.

The play's chief character, Clara, is of Bohemian descent; and Foote endows her with strength and compassion. Clara is the first of the many strong-minded yet vulnerable women that populate Foote's plays; and ironically, she is not an elderly matriarch or a young lady with aristocratic manners but a simple farm girl. We discover that Clara is torn between returning home to her family, where the remainder of her life would be spent as a manual field laborer or staying on as a waitress at Miller's Restaurant, where she is forced to cope with insults and cultural

prejudices. When her brother Louie shows up to tell her that her father wants her back home and reminds her that the Bohemians are taking control of the town, acquiring "more money and more land" (11), Clara proclaims that she will never go back to chopping cotton, feeding hogs or hoeing corn: "I broke my back standing in the hot sun. Always behind in school. I never learned nothing because I couldn't start til after cotton was cut. I did it. Long as I could stand it. I ain't got nothing for it. That's not enough. That's not enough. Working all year so's you can buy a tractor or a pig or a cow. That's not what I like. That's not what I want" (10). What Clara really wants is for the truck driver she fell in love with to marry her and take her away from the lonely and embittered world she inhabits. Whether her dream comes true is never answered in the play. Instead, in the end, we are left with a sense of hopelessness and futility as Clara peers out the restaurant window, waiting for the man she knows will never return, and attending to her customers who drink their lives away, while the world outside remains hostile and chaotic. Perhaps the character of Jack Weems articulates best the play's central theme when he pleads with Clara to "get out of this stinking hole. Leave these rotten bastards to their own death. You Bohunks are gonna finish us off, you're strong, make it quick. Help 'em to kill us. We're rotten and we're helping

you by fighting amongst ourselves. We need you to finish us . . . make it quick" (18).

Other images of family decay in a provincial world appear in the treatment of lonely and troubled youth in "Celebration," the second piece of Out of My House. When the play opens, Sonny and Babe Mavis have returned home after a year at college. To observe the occasion, their older sister Red is throwing a drinking party for them. But what begins as a joyous reunion soon turns into a bitter tragedy. We discover that Red's mother, a shadowy figure whom her daughter describes as "a hideous coward" with "old scrooched black hair and her face all hard from praying," (8) has ostracized Red from the family because of her drinking problem. Her daughter's image as a violent and dangerous woman does not speak well of her aristocratic heritage; but as Red understands it, her alcoholism is merely a symptom of the changes that threaten her family's existence: "Grandpa was an aristocrat. He was meant to rule. We were born different. But all around us, they had sprung to bind you. We're all that's left of the old. Grandpa told me that. But Mama, whispering her fears and her poisons, tried to make us forget it" (8). For years, Red has refused to listen to her mother's pleas for acceptance though she knows that her Grandpa was himself a drunken outcast. Red has become hard, bitter, and spiteful;

however, on this night, she will come to know the tragic consequence of her misplaced pride.

Red believes that the family's future depends on Sonny's becoming a successful lawyer and re-establishing the family's aristocratic position in the community. Even though Sonny knows he will never accomplish Red's goal, he enjoys her liquor and her violent stories about her encounters with common people. When Ellen Belle Croy, the neighborhood snob, disrupts a drinking celebration Red hosts for Sonny and Babe by questioning the social status of the Mavis family, Red becomes so enraged that she forces Sonny, whose heart condition limits his alcohol consumption, to drink to prove his manliness. Sadly, the alcohol excess causes Sonny's death.

While the first two plays depict a number of changes in Texas society during Foote's childhood, along with the tragic effects of clinging to aristocratic family traditions, the third play, "The Girls," provides a humorous glimpse of familial relationships ruined by obsessive greed. In this play, two spinster sisters, Nora and Sue Anthony, spend over thirty years of their lives trying to insure an inheritance from their rich Aunt Lizzie. Although the two sisters actually detest their aunt, they feign love and loyalty while secretly hoping for Aunt Lizzie's death. Their dreams come to naught when their new sister-in-law, in a passion of religious fervor, tells the sisters, in Aunt

Lizzie's presence, that they should confess their deceit and ask Aunt Lizzie's forgiveness (20). Shocked and hurt by their confession, Aunt Lizzie does not forgive them. Ironically, their disinheritance actually frees the women from the stress and pretense; Nora says, "This is Our Emancipation Day. Freedom. Wonderful Freedom . . . We're free" (37). Although "The Girls" is not one of Foote's better works, it does show his ability to create memorable characters through comic dialogue early in his career.

In the fourth play, "Behold a Cry," Foote again explores the theme of family disintegration as it relates to the stresses of societal changes. Like "Texas Town", the play is based on family legend and centers around two brothers, loosely patterned after the playwright's uncles. The play opens with Mrs. Weems, her son Ford, and her father Robedaux discussing the social evils that have afflicted their town and left them destitute. (Mr. Robedaux had lost his business to Mr. Peters, a dishonest businessman who swindled Mr. Robedaux out of his shop.) Because Ford is tired of his grandfather's bitterness and constant harangues about society's failings, he asserts himself and proclaims his intention of securing a better life. His plan includes marrying his boss' daughter, moving to a nicer home, and extricating himself from his relationship with his alcoholic brother Jack.

When Jack learns of Ford's plan, he is deeply hurt but agrees to leave the family rather than "wreck [their] lives" as Ford had suggested his presence would do (8). However, Ford's hatred explodes as he verbally assaults Jack's character and manhood. In response, Jack harshly condemns Ford as a hypocritical, arrogant "bastard" who cares for nothing or no one except himself (15).

Even though Mrs. Weems recognizes the truth of Jack's charges, she chooses to follow Ford. Jack is left grieving the loss of his family and questioning the value of his own life. In the end, he turns for consolation to Grandpa Robedaux, who offers only an empty, didactic speech pleading for world harmony and brotherly love as Jack exits into the dark night (21).

Even though Out of My House reveals a number of structural weaknesses, the content strongly suggests Foote's keen insight into the human experience and his compassion for society's unfortunates. Emerging, too, is his talent for creating realistic dialogue and for interpreting the darker aspects of family life in a small town. A number of formal patterns in the plays are typical of Foote. One pattern involves the parallel actions of the two unmarried sisters who must learn to survive in the face of economic failures. Another is depicted by the brothers who are divided by the pressures of social chaos. A third pattern involves the portrayal of blacks as sensitive observers of

truth. In addition, Foote frequently explores the consequences of alcoholism, death, and racism. Many of these patterns in Out of My House reappear in Foote's later works. The plays also provide a range of female types: strong-willed women, some of heroic proportions; women who are cowed by society or victimized by their family; and women who are in the full bloom of their first beauty. Perhaps Mary Hunter best explains the real strength of Out of My House in her preface to Foote's first published work, Only The Heart:

> At the time when every one of us in the company was re-evaluating our work in the scorching light of December seventh with humble and somewhat fearful hearts, I wrote a program note for Out of My House which I should like to repeat here because I feel it is still valid. 'It does not seem that our kind of theatre should serve as the medium for intellectual analysis or strive to present economic schemes; but rather that it should fuse elements of flesh and blood experience and try through emotional transfer to open the audience's own understanding. The South has been called the nation's leading economic and cultural problem. This is a fact that we are in danger of forgetting under the fierce pressure of war. But we should be aware of it as a vital sector on that other front we must defend if democracy is to be worth the total war effort.' (6-7)

Indeed, World War II wrought enormous changes in American society, and new voices in the theatre were caught between the old and the new traditions. The theatrical generation that encompassed Eugene O'Neill at the start of his career and Horton Foote at the beginning of his had directed its attention to the country's animating impulses and to an inspection of the national psyche, finding humor

and strength in the national life and native character and flaws and malignancies in the American Dream. The shock of the Depression in the 1930s and the realization that Soviet communism may have some viability led to an examination of American democracy and its future. Playwrights like Robert Sherwood, Maxwell Anderson, and Elmer Rice became interested in political protest and wrote works tinted with propaganda. The Group Theatre excited audiences into shouting for a strike at the close of Clifford Odets' 1934 play Waiting for Lefty, about an uprising of rank-and file-membership of a taxi union. The Federal Theatre project introduced a theatrical documentary, the Living Newspaper, to examine aspects of American life such as substandard housing, the rapaciousness of industry, and the subjugation of farmers by middlemen. The decade of the 1940s was the era of global unrest, and much of the political fervor of the previous decade was gradually absorbed by the pressures of war as the nation became chiefly concerned with a swift victory and a return to peace. But as conflict raged throughout the world, it became impossible to pretend that war was glorious or that it could permanently settle anything. Rather, glory had to be found in the courage with which Americans accepted an unpleasant task and in the vague hope for a better future. C.W.E. Bigsby explains in A Critical Introduction To Twentieth-Century American Drama that the post-war theatre "seemed more intensely psychological, less convinced

that experience could be subordinated to idea, altogether less assured. It seemed to reflect a sense of bafflement, the war having apparently drawn a line across a particular kind of historical development. And yet, of course, those who emerged as playwrights after 1945 had, in a sense, been shaped by the assumptions of the previous decade" (1).

Horton Foote was privy to the immense pressures of the 1940s, but his early experiences had prepared him to accept the reality of war as an inevitable part of life. Perhaps the events in Europe intensified the playwright's view of societal pressures as a threat to individual and familial happiness, awakened him more fully to the reality of human need, or made him more conscious of the destructiveness of materialistic pursuits; but the subject matter of his writings did not change. Foote's exploration of his familial roots and his attempt to recreate a small Southern town and its people remained his central preoccupation. However, as much as he tried to avoid the harsh realities around him, the war did affect Foote in a very personal way. In 1941, his brother Tom had followed him to New York in hopes of pursuing a career in acting. According to Foote, the two grew closer than they had ever been during this time; and Tom seemed destined for success. Then in the spring of 1941, after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, Tom Brooks Foote was drafted by the Army as a radio pilot on a fighter plane. His early experiences in the war are vague;

but we do know that on February 22, 1944, while fighting in the skies of Belgium, Tom's plane was shot down. The Foote family was devastated by the news and were unsure of Tom's status for over a year because military authorities refused to verify his death and continued to report the young man as missing in action. Foote recalls that it was not until after the war "when I met the man who had been his pilot that my brother's death was finally confirmed. Tom's body had been so disfigured by the crash that he had been buried in a military cemetery in Belgium" (Foote interview, 18 Nov. 1988). The news of Tom's death came hard to Foote's parents. The playwright remembers:

> My father put all of my brother's belongings in the attic and then said to me that 'someday when the pain and hurt are gone, you and your children can have them.' It must have been very rough for him. I don't think my mother ever got over it; she was never able to talk about it. I know it haunted her the rest of her life. I will never forget sitting in the living room just after the war had ended and you could hear people celebrating the return of their boys. One woman, who had known my brother, came rushing into the house in tears. My mother became frantic and the woman said, 'Oh, Mrs. Foote say something to help me!' My mother broke down and began to cry. I believe that was the most insensitive thing anyone could have said to her at that time. (Foote interview, 18 Nov. 1988)

Foote's parents did finally come to terms with their grief, but the war had changed the family forever and their feelings of loss never faded. Foote's own acceptance of his brother's death can be best understood as a theme in his writings: man can endure hardships and continue to live a

meaningful life even after the unexpected and sudden loss of someone he loves. As Reynolds Price suggests in his preface to Foote's Orphans' Home Cycle, Horton Foote's plays remind us that "Suffering (to the point of devastation) is the central human condition and our most unavoidable mystery. Yet we can survive it and sing in its face" (xii).

In spite of the grief and sadness that Foote must have felt during the war years, he continued to be a very productive playwright. He learned better how to combine stories, create characters, and write dialogue that would more aptly express his vision of the provincial world of his childhood. In the summer of 1942, he began a new three-act play, Mamie Borden, and submitted it to Mary Hunter that fall. Hunter was very enthusiastic about producing the play and approached the Hollywood actress Hilda Vaughn about playing the lead role. Foote remembers that Vaughn read the piece, agreed to take on the part, but wanted the title of the play changed: "She felt that Mamie Borden would be confused with Lizzie Borden, and suggested Only the Heart, a phrase from a Heine poem. I thought it was much too flowery and had nothing to do with the play, but since I could think of nothing better, and wanted her for the part, I finally agreed to her suggestion" ("Learning to Write" 82).

First produced at the Provincetown Playhouse in December 1942, Only The Heart is a domestic drama that explores both specific concerns of the era in which it was

written and the more universal theme of family destruction. Only The Heart takes place in September 1921, in the small Gulf Coast town of Richmond, Texas, a prosperous community where the discontent of the war years has been replaced by a new order that values money and professional success. The action of the play centers around Mamie Borden, a wealthy businesswoman, whose obsessive drive for affluence and attempts to manipulate her family into positions of dependency lead to her own tragic downfall. Mamie is a type of woman generic to America's domestic life in the '20s, and many of her more admirable qualities resemble those of the playwright's own Grandmothers Brooks and Davenport.

In her preface to the published version of Only The Heart, Mary Hunter said that her main problem in directing the role of Mamie Borden was to discover the real and essential qualities of the character and to emphasize those rather than to focus on events. Mamie's character flaw was her deep need to control and manipulate others in such a way that they depended on her, thus giving her power and security rather than loving relationships (7).

Mamie, who is responsible for the upbringing of her sisters after their mother's death and their father's rejection of his own responsibility, admits that she made many mistakes as a surrogate parent. She forbids her sister India's marriage to Jack Turner, a "kind" but "reckless" young man, because Mamie feels his habits are not steady

enough. She also ruins her own marriage by demanding that Mr. Borden meet her own standards for living, thus motivating him to take a Bohemian mistress. Mamie then turns to work as a sedative to relieve her pain and adopts the philosophy that "as long as a person has work to do, you can get by . . . Get busy . . . then nothing can hurt you for long" (71). Then she begins manipulating her daughter Julia, persuading her to marry Albert, a young man whom Mamie has selected for Julia and one whom Mamie feels she can control. Julia, caught between her desire to please her mother and her need to make a life for herself, chooses to obey Mamie's wishes.

Mamie's authority over the family is complete at this time; however, problems begin emerging. Although Julia grows to love Albert, she feels lonely and unloved because Albert is completely absorbed in his work as Mamie's business partner. Mamie's need to control veils her underlying problem--her inability to have a healthy, loving relationship which involves both giving and taking. As Albert and Julia begin to sense their own marital problems, Julia goes to her father and Aunt India for advice. She learns of the tragic losses they have both suffered because of Mamie's dominance. As Act Three ends, Mamie's control is being questioned.

The character of Julia, who owes much of her believability to the playwright's own mother, reveals

Foote's sensitivity to the struggles of young women who are reared in a strict environment. When Julia faces the possible ruin of her marriage, she is forced to choose between her mother's desires and her own priorities. She chooses to save her marriage. She confronts her mother with these haunting words: "Ever since I can remember I felt there was something wrong between us, about us. It frightened me. I felt strange and unnatural. . . . Albert and I could never get along in this house, because every time he came near me, I could feel your fear. Your fear of anything warm and loving. . . . That's why I'm leaving. I know now. That's what's driving me away" (70).

Julia's announcement provokes Mamie to express her true feelings of hurt and loss. She angrily threatens to disinherit Julia and tries to persuade Albert to divorce her. However, Albert realizes the strength and truth behind Julia's pronouncement and follows his wife to Houston to begin a new life, free from Mamie's control. In the end, Mamie is left to face her secret fear--a bitter loneliness against which her only weapon, compulsive work, will surely fail.

Only The Heart is better developed than the one-acts that comprise Out of My House. Family relationships remain the playwright's central focus, but he takes pains to show us a more contained version of familial life. In Only The Heart, unlike the earlier plays, which show family members

interacting with the community, the Borden family is cut off from the outside world and turned in upon itself. All the action takes place in the Borden home; and the family is small, with two parents, two children, and an aunt who, like Foote's black characters, serves as the source of familial wisdom. Not only is the family isolated from the outside world, but isolation is the keynote of their relations with one another. They seldom communicate; rather, they are confused and reticent about expressing their true emotions. Mamie's inability to overcome her fearful past and her mistaken belief that survival depends on not letting "people get at you, hurt you," (72) is the real source of the family's failure. For her, the family is no longer a viable source of tenderness, love, and affection but rather a battlefield where recurring quarrels are endlessly fought. Her tragedy is that she has become so conditioned by her past that she no longer knows how to be a nurturing sister, wife, or mother. Like her, all the Bordens are searching for love, trust, understanding, and security; but for each of them, fulfillment of such needs must come from outside the home.

In Only The Heart Foote explored a situation that would later reappear in over half of his plays--the courageous flight of a young woman to escape her familial bondage in order to retain her dignity, find personal identity, and achieve human potential in an uncertain and selfish world.

From the memory of his own mother and grandmother, Foote also proved his ability to create female characters who possess the admirable virtues of courage, endurance, and resolution that make them believable and memorable. If I read Only The Heart correctly, Foote does not blame Mamie for her failure and her tragic ending; after all, through no fault of her own she was forced to assume a man's duties and a man's role. Her inner sickness may well have been irreversible. What seems more appropriate is that Foote celebrates Julia's defiance and the spirit with which she strikes out on her own. As in real life, there is no guarantee at the play's end that Julia's life or the lives of any of these characters will be better, that Julia and Albert's marriage will survive the strains of a difficult beginning, or that Mamie can withstand the pain of losing her children or, finally, expose her need to be loved. Like us, they must all face their fears and learn to cope with the indignities and heartaches of the human experience.

Only The Heart is diminished if we regard it as merely a reflection of, and comment on, the family scene. Certainly, it presents a powerful indictment of parental manipulation and personal greed; but its essential theme is much deeper and more universal. The play considers mankind and nature, the breakdown of the human family and consequent isolation of the individual, and most of all, the fact and consequences of mankind's alienation in a materialistic

post-war world. The tragedy of Mamie Borden is also the tragedy of many people during the 1940s who, like her, may have believed that following the war "there's gonna be more happy people in this country than was ever known before. Jobs for everyone . . . wages higher than was ever known before, cotton soaring and now oil. Every paper you pick up says everyone's gonna be happy. Rich and happy" (32). Foote clearly demonstrates that affluence, proclaimed as a value, leaves one alienated, not only from family but from humanity as a whole.

Only The Heart was well received when it premiered at the Provincetown Playhouse in 1942. It drew the attention of producer Luther Green and French writer Jacques Therie. Green wanted to produce the play for Broadway but could not persuade actress Pauline Lord to perform the role of Mamie Borden. Therie, who thought the play could be profitable on Broadway only if it were rewritten, persuaded Foote to accompany him to Hollywood in the spring of 1944. Foote was to help translate Therie's newly-written film from French to English and collaborate on the rewrite of Only The Heart for Broadway production. Foote was displeased with the extensive changes made to his play. "Whatever raw power it originally had," Foote would later say, "was diluted" (Reinert 330). As Foote explained to Terry Barr in a 1985 interview, his initial experiences with Hollywood were distressing: "After work I would sit around with Billy

Wilder and others and listen to them talk about plots. I couldn't tolerate this; I didn't know or care to abstractly discuss ideas. I stayed in Hollywood for three months, and returned to the East to live near other playwright friends" (qtd. in Barr 41-2). The commercial world of Hollywood held no attraction for Foote; and when he discovered that Therie could not raise the money for a Broadway production of Only The Heart as he had promised, the playwright returned to New York financially broke but much wiser.

In New York, Foote discovered that the American Actors Company had found the backing for a production of Only The Heart; and on December 30, 1944, the new version of the play received its Broadway premiere. However, the production, which featured the cast of June Walker as Mamie, Mildred Dunnock as her sister India, Eleanor Anton as Julia, Will Hare as Albert, and Maurice Wells as Mr. Borden, was not liked by the critics; and the play closed after only six weeks. To make matters worse, Foote received no royalties for his part in the production and was forced to look for employment elsewhere.

As fate would have it, Sanford Meisner asked the young playwright to take over his second-year acting students at the Neighborhood School Playhouse Theatre and rehearse them in a senior production that combined all their studies: dance, music, and acting. Foote had been interested in dance and music since his early days with the American

Actors Company when he worked with Agnes DeMille on "American Legend," met the great dancer Doris Humphrey, and became familiar with the choreography of Jerome Robbins and Anthony Tudor. By the time he began work at the Neighborhood Playhouse, he was already well versed in the finer points of modern dance and had considered incorporating much of what he had learned from these masters into his own plays. As he later admitted, "Certainly at this period of dance, there were no playwrights being produced that could equal the seriousness of purpose and the storytelling talents of Graham, Humphrey, and Tudor" ("Learning to Write" 80). But it was not until he met dancers Valerie Bettis, Bernardo Segall, and Pearl Primus that the playwright seriously began to explore the potential of intermingling dance, music, and words in his dramas. Foote explains:

> Modern dance, in all its early purity, was everywhere in New York in these days--young dancers were constantly hiring a hall for one night and giving a solo concert. These solos were often danced to narrated poems. I narrated a Carl Sandburg poem for a solo by a young Humphrey dancer, again for the black dancer Pearl Primus (the poem 'Strange Fruit') and for Valerie Bettis reading John Malcolm Brinnin's poem, 'The Desperate Heart.' Valerie and I began our rehearsals together in her studio, and from the first day found working together exciting and challenging. Our association and friendship was to continue for many years. . . . <u>The Desperate Heart</u> received an ovation at its first performance and we repeated it many times in dance recitals around the city over the next few years. We would have long talks in those days about the relation of dance, music, and words. Valerie was very much against what she considered the realistic theatre,

> and she wanted to see created a theatre that used more boldly the elements of dance, words, and music. ("Learning to Write" 80-81)

Soon, Foote was caught up in the world of dance and avant-garde theatre; and in April 1944, he composed a one-act dance play "Daisy Lee," for his friends and colleagues Valerie Bettis and Bernardo Segall, who wrote a musical score for the work and presented it at the 92nd Street YMHA. In 1945, Foote wrote another dance play, "The Lonely," that he co-directed with Martha Graham and a more realistic piece, entitled "Goodbye To Richmond," which were both produced at the Neighborhood Playhouse. Unfortunately, little is known about these plays since the playwright has made none of them available for study; what we do know is that, even today, Foote continues to be influenced by dance and music. Both play a highly suggestive role in his work, from the hymns and country waltzes in The Trip To Bountiful and Tender Mercies to the dance sequences in The Dancers and Courtship. These elements remain essential parts of Foote's writings.

While Horton Foote's association with great dancers like Bettis, Segall, and Graham inspired him to experiment with new forms of drama and explore other approaches to theatre, there was another, more pragmatic element in New York that counseled him to be practical, to stop writing about family life in small-town Texas, to avoid experimentation, and to turn his attention to writing

successful Broadway works. One such person was the director-playwright Howard Lindsay, who wanted to push Foote into writing a more commercial type of play. According to Foote, Lindsay thought that he had great promise as a writer; and he wanted to offer two words of wisdom to the young playwright: "The first was never to write a play about a character you wouldn't care to entertain in your own living room, and the second, that when he took a play out of town for tryout he never watched the actors when it was performed, but the audience to see when they got bored or restless" ("Learning to Write" 88). Though Foote was depressed by what Lindsay had to say, he never looked back. He knew that he was destined to write about the place and the people that he had "not so much chosen," but who had chosen him as their spokesman: "There hasn't been a year that has passed that someone, somewhere, hasn't asked me to change the pattern of my writing, to find stories and people they think what? More accessible to a larger public? More commercial? But no matter--I can't. Even if I wanted to, which I don't--I can't. These are my people and my stories, and the plays I want to write--really, the only ones I know how to write" ("Learning to Write" 91).

Perhaps Foote knew well the feelings of another young southern playwright, Tennessee Williams, who approached him in 1945 about playing the role of Tom in his newly-written play The Glass Menagerie. Foote had met Tennessee Williams

when he brought his play You Touched Me to the American Actors Company to produce and had seen him again in California when he was working with Jacques Therie. After Foote returned to New York, the two had kept in touch; and Williams had written him to say that he had a new play, which he felt was uncommercial, but which had a part for his friend. Foote was not interested in acting; but he was very taken with the play, then called "The Gentleman Caller." Foote asked Williams if he could do "The Gentleman Caller" scene from the play in a production at the Neighborhood Playhouse. Williams agreed, but as the playwright remembers: "Two days before the scene was to be performed a friend, who had seen rehearsals, met Tennessee and told him how pleased he was with what he had seen. He said Tennessee had a stricken look on his face and said, 'I've just sold the play to Eddie Dowling. He let me, however, continue with our production and so I directed, at least in part, the first production of the play that was soon to be known as The Glass Menagerie" ("Learning to Write" 85-86).

Clearly, Foote's work at the Neighborhood Playhouse was artistically rewarding; but it did not pay enough to support him, so he was forced to find supplemental income. He remembered reading that William Faulkner had once supported himself by working in a New York bookstore; so the playwright took a position as manager of the Pennsylvania Station branch of the Doubleday Book Store, where he worked

the night shift from five to eleven. The job proved to be beneficial to Foote in more ways than he had expected. It not only provided steady employment and allowed him to continue writing plays and teaching at the Neighborhood Playhouse during the day; but while working at Doubleday's, he met his future wife, Lillian Vallish. At the time, Lillian was attending college at Radcliffe and had taken a semester off to work in New York. When she applied for a job as a clerk, Foote was instantly taken by the lovely young woman and hired her for the night shift. As he remembers, "She loved writing and books, and we soon became inseparable" ("Learning to Write" 87). Six weeks later, they were engaged; and on June 4, 1945, following Lillian's graduation, they married. For almost fifty years, until her death on August 5, 1992, Lillian was Horton's best friend, loving companion, and protector; and together they reared four children: Barbara Hallie (March 31, 1950), Albert Horton III (November 7, 1952), Walter Vallish (December 4, 1955), and Daisy Brooks (July 3, 1959). Not only was Lillian a loyal wife, but as we shall see later, she enhanced and strengthened her husband's career as well.

When Foote married, he had only recently decided that writing was his true calling. Even though he had gained a reputation as a promising playwright, the commercial pressures and expectations of New York began to burden him. The American Actors Company had disbanded, leaving the

playwright without a place to perform his plays. Then the war ended, and the actors, directors, and writers who had been in the army returned home with news of a new kind of avant-garde theatre much different from Broadway. Foote recalls that compared with the works of such French writers as Sartre, Camus, Ionesco, and Anouilh "the New York theatre seemed grim and uninspired" ("Learning to Write" 89). For a time, Foote tried to ignore the changes taking place in the American theatre by following Valerie Bettis' advice to concentrate entirely on works for a totally non-realistic, lyric theatre. In 1945, he finished a dance play "In My Beginning," which Darius Milhaud set to music and Bettis later directed; but this success did not relieve Foote's growing frustrations. As he later admitted, "There were just too many expectations and I wasn't being given a chance to fail" (Foote interview, 18 Nov. 1988). He began asking himself why he had no desire to write topical works about social issues of the day, why he was not interested in writing well-made formula plays, or why he was growing tired of exploring new theatrical forms. Each of his experiences had played an important part in his career and would always influence whatever he wrote; but at this point in his life, Foote was searching for a distinctly personal style that would more aptly convey the stories of his family and the world in which he grew up. It was not until 1945 when his wife Lillian introduced him to the works of Texas writer

Katherine Anne Porter that Foote found that style. After reading Porter's three short novels in Pale Horse, Pale Rider, Foote remembers that he was taken aback by the novelist's ability to transform the memories of her past into a remarkably lyrical but realistic prose form. It had a lasting effect on him, for here "was a supreme prose stylist, yet with no trace of artifice. No local colorist and not sentimental about the past, and yet using the past and the region of her birth to create her imagined world" ("Learning to Write" 90). Foote instantly recognized the similarities between himself and Porter and was influenced not only by her technique but by the territory in which she most successfully worked. Both were Texans dedicated to translating the experiences of their youth into fiction; and both were interested in strong, energetic, effective women as subject matter. Like the novelist, Foote was also drawn to the kind of poetic but true-to-life language and symbolic imagery of his native region; and he was also interested, as was Porter, in depicting the mysterious realities of the human experience. In a 1965 interview in Writers at Work: The 'Paris Review' Interviews, Katherine Anne Porter provides a manifesto that could equally stand as an explanation of Horton Foote's purpose in writing:

> There seems to be a kind of order in the universe, in the movement of the stars and the turning of the earth and the changing of the seasons, and even in the cycle of human life. But human life itself is almost pure chaos . . . We don't really know what is going to happen to us, and we don't

> know why. . . . the work of the artist--the only thing he's good for--is to take these handfuls of confusion and disparate things, things that seem to be irreconcilable, and put them together in a frame to give them some kind of shape and meaning. (Thompson 150-51, 161-62)

Even today, Katherine Anne Porter continues to have a major influence on Horton Foote. As Gerald Wood suggests in his preface to Selected One-Act Plays of Horton Foote, Foote uses "art as a 'frame to give shape and meaning' to the otherwise 'almost pure chaos' of human life. The Texas voices, characters and stories in his work are Foote's tools in his quest for continuity and tradition. But the goals of his search are not just particular and regional. He wants to discover the roots of courage, the peace of identity, and the healing power of our myths and legends. For an artist who commits himself to the eternal struggle of order against disorder, nothing less will satisfy" (xx).

In 1945, the Footes moved out of New York to Washington, D.C., where Horton could write as he wished, away from the commercial pressures of Broadway. Valerie Bettis and Bernardo Segall were offered a job teaching at the King-Smith School in Washington, and they asked the couple to join them and friend Vincent Donehue in running the school and forming a new theatre group. In Washington, Foote was allowed ample time to write and produce his plays as well as direct productions of works by Lorca, Sartre, Ibsen, Chekov, Williams, and Synge. It was a very fruitful time for the playwright who, during a four year period,

wrote four one-acts, Homecoming, People in the Show, The Return, Themes and Variations, and began work on one of the most important plays of his career, The Chase.

The Chase, which was later turned into a novel and a feature film, was loosely based on an actual incident that occurred in the playwright's hometown and the friends and family members who were caught up in one of the most violent moments in Wharton County history. The play is a serious examination of the responsibility of a community in the making of a criminal and deals with the emotional conflicts of a Texas sheriff faced with the knowledge that killing to uphold the law can be as soul shattering as murder. In his 1952 essay "Richmond U.S.A.," Foote elaborates on the drama's unseen background--the town of Richmond and its citizens--and the inherent conflicts of The Chase:

> My plays are generally placed in a small town in Texas. This town is not Wharton. It is a town of my imagination and combines characteristics of small towns I have known on the Texas Gulf Coast. I call my town Richmond. It is the county seat and has two cotton gins, an oil well and stores built around the courthouse square. Richmond is populated by people who trace their arrival to the Eighteen Thirties. Negro families who came with them as slaves, Mexicans who crept in as wetbacks during cotton-picking season, and Central Europeans who arrived in America in the early Nineteen Twenties. The town is fed and sustained by its cotton farms, its grazing herds, its rice fields and its pecan groves. The country surrounding the town is physically a land of great contrast. There are areas of flat, ugly prairie land; there are miles of bottom land dense with trees and foliage. Nature is very kind to this section. Its people can grow crops three times a year. Its land is rich with oil and sulphur. Contrariwise, there are the hazards as well--

hurricanes in the fall before the cotton is picked, drought, too much rain during planting time, too frequent showers while the cotton is maturing. The people here spend a great deal of their time watching the skies--a year's work, a year's income can be wiped out in a day by a hurricane or too much rain. At one time the plantation system flourished; now the plantations have been broken up into small farms or ranches. 'The White Man's Union' is defunct, and the Negro is beginning to vote and is slowly gaining admission to the universities. The segregation of the Mexicans is also breaking down. Of course, like most small Southern towns, Richmond is taking sides about all this. There are farmers, the oil crews, the cotton buyers, doctors, cooks and beauty parlor operators, the land owners, the bankers whose lives in some way are influenced by all these social changes. I have given them names. The white people are Mavises, Weems, Strachens, Robedauxs, Damons and Stewarts; the Negroes are Splendids, Lesters and Leroys. . . . I like to think of my plays as a moral and social history of Richmond. I try to choose for my characters problems which are specific to their particular section and yet will have some meaning for the outer world. In my writing in the past, I have concentrated mainly on the problems of the upper and middle classes and the old land-holding aristocracy. Actually, aristocracy as it is known in the rest of the South is just a memory kept alive by the great aunts and the old men in Richmond. It did exist and the tradition is kept alive through tales of the past. But, economically, such a way of life has hardly been feasible for twenty-five or thirty years. I saw the last of it go when I was a child. I heard it mourned and glorified and the passing of it finally accepted. The middle class now reigns supreme--their thinking, their tastes, and their culture. The prosperity of the region has made them flourish. Surrounding them, serving them are the poorer groups--the tenant farmers, the servants, the day laborers. These worlds seldom meet. They do meet in 'The Chase'--brought together by the dehumanization of one man, Bubber Reeves, and a sheriff struggling to escape dehumanization. I have tried to make Richmond true to itself, true to the towns I have known. It has its tragedies and comedies, its rich and poor, its great virtues and its terrible injustices. (1-3:3)

At the moral center of this volatile world is Sheriff Eldon Hawes, who has been sheriff of Richmond for almost fifteen years. Because he and his wife Ruby want to rear their son in a quieter, less demanding atmosphere than that afforded a sheriff's family, Hawes decides to purchase a farm and live a simpler life.

His plans are interrupted by the escape from prison of Bubber Reeves, a Richmond resident who had been in legal trouble most of his life and who had finally been sent to prison for murder. The townspeople, who had been cruel and abusive to Bubber as a boy, become hysterical at the news of his escape. Many of them fear that Bubber will come back to Richmond to avenge the wrongs they did to him when he was a youngster; therefore, the people pressure Hawes to capture Bubber, threatening to lynch Bubber themselves if the sheriff does not settle the matter.

The town's violence causes an ironic reversal of the classic Western plot; it is now the criminal rather than the townspeople who must be protected by the sheriff.

In hopes of saving her son, Mrs. Reeves tells Sheriff Hawes where to find Bubber, hoping the sheriff can persuade Bubber to surrender before the townspeople find him. Bubber, however, threatens Hawes with a gun, causing Hawes to kill Bubber to protect himself. Tragically, when Hawes examines Bubber's gun, he finds it empty.

The play's final scene focuses on Hawes, whose failure to save Bubber has left him emotionally shattered. In his own heart, he cannot justify what he did. Ruby finally awakens her husband to his role in Bubber's fate: "All I know is you did your best. You tried. That's all we can ask. . . . This chase didn't start tonight. It didn't end tonight. Don't run away Hawes. Keep on livin'. Keep on tryin'" (59). The play ends with Hawes' promise to speak to a young uncontrollable twelve-year-old boy, who has run away from home, and his acknowledgment that "all a man can do is try" (60). Whether Hawes will continue as sheriff, whether he and Ruby will ever own a cotton farm, or whether their child will grow up free from the violence and bigotry of Richmond is left to the imagination. Ultimately, we are left with a mood of restrained optimism slowly surfacing through Eldon Hawes' pain and struggle.

In The Chase, Horton Foote created, from his own experiences and cultural environment, a powerful record of the horror and tragedy that result from prejudice, injustice, and mass hysteria. His concern for the moral and social decay of Richmond is clearly evident as community malice, familial indifference, intolerance, and depravity threaten the lives of its people. Fear and violence and the consequences, in this small Texas community, are depicted credibly; but Foote does not lecture or preach. Rather, he allows the viewer to observe human beings in interaction

without condemning or dictating what conclusions to draw. Foote is concerned with the conflict between classes and the fears that cause common people to rise up against law and order, but his major emphasis is on Eldon Hawes and his struggle to overcome the inescapable and unavoidable situation in which he finds himself. For what matters above all is the final attitude the protagonist takes toward his humiliation, suffering, and personal failures. In the end, Hawes' fear and deep anger at injustice are rendered tolerable by the presence of his wife and child and the realization that he might be able to spare another young boy from suffering the tragedy of Bubber Reeves. For Hawes, the chase continues.

The Chase stands as the finest achievement in Foote's early career, but the playwright would not see his new play produced on Broadway until April 15, 1952. Initially, he entered The Chase in a playwriting contest; but as Foote recalls, what started as a very good prospect soon dwindled into no prospect at all: "Herman Shumlin, one of the judges, said I'd have no trouble winning the prize but he wished I'd withdraw it from the contest because he wanted to produce it. I withdrew it but as things worked out, he never got around to it" (Foote Interview, 18 Nov. 1988). When Jose Ferrer finally produced and directed the play, Horton Foote was already writing for the medium of television.

Horton Foote returned to New York in 1950. By this time, he had been a playwright for ten years. He had seen his dreams of being a Broadway actor give way to the truth that his art really lay in his writing, not in his performing. He had written approximately eighteen plays, most of them having been given productions in Broadway and Off-Broadway theatres, and he had experimented with various theatrical forms. Over the years, Foote had learned much about the theatre from many varied and unexpected sources--from his Russian acting teachers, from great dance choreographers like Graham, Bettis, DeMille, Humphrey, Tudor, from the many writers and directors he had admired and worked with, and from the productions of his own plays. Now he had reached a point in his life when he wanted to reflect and try to assimilate what he had experienced.

The true constant in Horton Foote's early career was the fact that no matter how experimental he became as a writer, the impulse behind his creativity was always his family and homeplace of Wharton, Texas. As he confessed in a 1988 interview:

> I have lived for many years in New York and New Hampshire, and I have heard many stories there and have enjoyed listening to them. And yet when I am faced with a blank sheet of paper, I never think of New Hampshire or New York or hear the voices of those friends and acquaintances. In Wharton or away, I think a great deal of what I remember or what I see now. Of course, I have to go beyond that, because I am not reporting remembered stories, or my own remembrance of things, or what I see before me now, for, finally, all that has to be reordered, as it were, in the hope that my

> writing will transcend literal reporting and be transformed into a work of art containing its own reality and truth, never, however, departing from the reality and truth from which it took root. (Foote interview, 18 Nov. 1988)

Indeed, the 1940s was a fruitful time for Horton Foote, but the following decade would prove to be an even more extraordinary period of growth, as the young playwright would face new challenges, explore a different kind of artistic medium, and become one of the true pioneers of the "Golden Age" of television.

CHAPTER 3
WRITING FOR TELEVISION

> As the television writer learns to look within himself and those around him for the eternal and infinitely variable human conflicts, he will learn how the television camera can serve as the scalpel with which to lay bare the human heart and spirit. (Bailey 226)

Horton Foote's career took a fortuitous turn in 1950 when colleague Vincent Donehue helped him secure a job writing scripts for NBC's The Gabby Hayes Show, a weekly television series that featured the adventurous exploits of the Western character Gabby Hayes. Foote worked on this show for only two seasons (October 1950 to December 1951), but his involvement with the program and the NBC television network helped set the stage for a crucial development in his career. In 1951, Foote was commissioned to write a one-act play for NBC's Lamp Unto My Feet, a religious-based television series that was seeking to enlarge its audience and alter the scope of its programming. Foote had never before attempted to write an original half-hour television drama, but he accepted the offer and submitted a work entitled Ludie Brooks. Loosely based on a tragic episode in the life of his grandfather, the play tells the story of an aging small-town preacher forced to cope with the death of his only daughter. Ludie Brooks, which aired on NBC in February, 1951, caught the attention of Fred Coe, founding producer of NBC's Television Playhouse, who recognized Foote's ability to write for the new medium. In 1952, Coe

hired the playwright to create original dramas for the Playhouse and thereby instigated one of the most productive and satisfying periods in Horton Foote's career. Before the year ended, two of his works, The Travelers and The Old Beginning, aired on the new series; and by 1964, more than twenty plays by Foote had appeared on such shows as Goodyear Theatre, Philco Television Playhouse, Gulf Playhouse, and Playhouse 90. The playwright's pioneering efforts helped to achieve for television drama an increasing respect during its legendary Golden Age; and Foote's plays earned for their creator a celebrity far greater than he had ever dreamed possible.

When Horton Foote first went to work for NBC, he was teaching part time at the American Theatre School in New York, writing, and trying to get his works performed on stage, without success. He and his wife Lillian were expecting their first baby, and he desperately needed a job that would not only support his family but also give him time to pursue his writing. But Broadway producers were experiencing financial woes. In 1950, New York theatre audiences were dwindling, playhouses were closing, and the price of tickets to Broadway shows was climbing. Unemployment among actors, directors, and writers was on the rise; and Foote found himself struggling to make a living in the legitimate theatre.

Broadway's decline was in large part the result of television's growing appeal to the American public. Experimentation with the new medium began before World War II and was suspended during the conflict; but as early as 1945, television sets began to appear in the United States. As Kenneth Hey states in his essay Marty: Aesthetics vs. Medium in Early Television Drama: "In 1946, about ten thousand television sets sat in living rooms primarily in large cities; three years later that figure had jumped to 1 million, and by 1955, 32.5 million sets delivered sponsors' messages to home audiences" (96). The impact of television's growth on the theatre and film industries was almost cataclysmic. Spectators by the millions chose to stay home and watch the black and white screen as creative artists like Horton Foote began to migrate to the newer medium. Almost overnight the number of Writers' Guild of America members working in television grew from forty-five in February 1951 to one hundred ten by the end of that year. By 1952, the number had grown to such heights that Edward Barry Roberts, an NBC script editor, was prompted to comment, "The centers of production are swarming with would-be television writers. The competition is killing, although paradoxically there aren't enough really good writers to supply the demand. Yet it is only through good writing that television will grow and fulfill its potential destiny as the most fascinating and the most important means ever known

of communicating information, entertainment, and education. We are all waiting hopefully and impatiently for the television artist-playwright to appear" (300).

Every culture has had its storytelling means, and postwar America had television theatre. During the 1950s, each network had at least one weekly program such as The United States Steel Hour, Lucky Strike Theatre, and Kraft Television Theatre that beamed live versions of Broadway plays or literary masterpieces across the national airwaves. The anthology series, which uniquely characterized the medium's Golden Age, became so popular that many people began to envision the future of American drama in television. Edward Barry Roberts best explained the reason for the popularity of these shows when he stated, "More than prose, more than the stage, more than motion pictures--oh, so much more than radio--television, with its immediacy, gets to the heart of the matter, to the essence of the character, to the depicting of the human being who is there, as if under a microscope, for our private contemplation, for our approval, our rejection, our love, our hate, our bond of brotherhood recognized" (296). Certainly, the storytelling capabilities of the television camera were unique; but as the demand for quality drama increased, producers found themselves struggling to find suitable material for broadcasting. Their search for appropriate and imaginative

television scripts resulted in the creation of a new form of drama--the teleplay.

Credit for the creation of original television drama must be given to Fred Coe. A graduate of Yale University's School of Drama, Coe had worked in television since 1945 when he became production manager of NBC in New York. By the time the network placed him in charge of the Sunday evening anthology series Television Playhouse, he had written, directed, and produced so many successful productions for television that he commanded remarkable respect and freedom. Consequently, when the Philco-Goodyear Playhouse premiered in October, 1948, everyone at NBC supported Coe's belief that the mission of the program was to bring hit Broadway plays to America by way of the television set. But as Coe recalls in his 1954 essay "TV Drama's Declaration of Independence," this initial idea proved unworkable because theatre dramatists did not create enough plays to cover television's schedule:

> We took Broadway plays, trimmed them to an hour and cast them with Broadway players, topped by a Broadway star. Within a couple of months it became obvious that this could not work out. We were running out of material! Broadway did fifty or sixty plays a year, many of which were unsuited or unavailable for our show. We had to produce a one-hour television drama every week, fifty-two weeks a year, and the Broadway cupboard was bare almost before we started. Furthermore, the advent of kinescope--that process whereby a program is filmed for rebroadcast--was an additional complication. It had not been decided legally whether a kinescope was a film or a delayed broadcast. We had to avoid properties owned by the movies, in the event the 'kinnies' were

> eventually to be considered films. And the movies owned everything. Fearful and hostile, they shut up their properties in vaults and cellars and waited fruitlessly for the clock to turn back (31).

When Coe's original idea faltered, he tried converting classic dramas to television. Plays like Rostand's Cyrano de Bergerac as well as works by Shakespeare underwent major revisions and cutting before reaching the living-room screen. When these ran short, Coe tried short stories and novels by authors such as Charles Dickens and F. Scott Fitzgerald; but this scheme also proved unsatisfactory because writers could not successfully cut a novel to fit within an hour format. Eventually, Coe was forced to move away from published and produced works and to explore the use of original television dramas. In consequence, the one-hour teleplay evolved.

In the essay cited above, Coe explained the process by which television made its break with copyrighted manuscripts. The writers decided that since they were already researching topics, they might as well write original scripts and documentaries to fit television's format rather than purchase manuscripts written from the same research material. The success of H. R. Hays' Vincent Van Gogh, the first original television documentary, proved that television was mature enough to "develop its own talent in the writing, directing, producing, designing, and technical fields--but especially in the writing field" (87).

Coe believed that television's hour long program with its commercial announcements provided an excellent format in which to produce a drama. The hour production corresponds to a three-act play, with the commercial breaks serving as curtains, allowing the writers "to build to climaxes and the audiences to relax between peaks of dramatic tension" (87).

Perhaps because Fred Coe did not see television drama as a regressive step from the theatre, he was able to assemble a creative and harmonious production team for the Television Playhouse that produced quality work within the preordained structure. Directors such as Vincent Donehue, Delbert Mann, and Arthur Penn, and actors, including Gene Lyons, Rod Steiger, Grace Kelly, Lillian Gish, and Kim Stanley found a hospitable, creative environment at NBC; and under Coe's guidance, they were able to create memorable scenes in live television production. More importantly, writers Paddy Chayefsky, N. Richard Nash, Tad Mosel, Robert Alan Arthur, David Shaw, and Horton Foote assumed a central position in TV drama, gaining for writers the celebrity of stars.

In his preface to Harrison, Texas, a collection of eight teleplays written for the Playhouse series, Foote was very complimentary of the staffs with whom he worked when writing for television. In contrast to some writers who said quality was sacrificed for commercialism, Foote found this untrue. The mistakes that were made, according to

Foote, "were failures of judgement, talent, or expectations--not the deliberate, malicious, cynical, or capricious distortion that goes on so much nowadays in the commercial mediums" (viii).

It is no wonder that Horton Foote and other playwrights flourished in this atmosphere. Clearly, the television writer was not only supported in his endeavors, but he was also considered the principal artistic source for the medium and granted considerable control over the presentation of his material. As TV writer Ernest Kinoy explains:

> The general practice in live television of this time was to accept the notion of the writer as the original instigator-creator of a particular play. This was picked up from Broadway, where the author is considered the man who has produced the work, who has done the thing which is going to be presented. Therefore, you would, in most cases, continue with it in a relatively respected position, along through the rehearsals to the final presentation on the air. And your opinion was sought and listened to with varying degrees of attention. But as a pattern, the writer was considered to belong with his property until it was finally presented. (630)

Because of this control, playwrights were able to uncover the particular strengths of the medium and learn how effectively to communicate their dramas within the requirements of the electronic medium. Fred Coe pointed out that at NBC writers "know the physical problems of producing a 'live' show on TV, just as a professional Broadway playwright knows how many sets and characters are practical to use. And they are exposed to camera techniques, lighting problems and just about everything else. They come to the

first script reading, and for the next ten days in which the show is wheeled and whacked into shape, the author is with his play" (87).

For the playwright, the special properties of television supported a new kind of dramatic realism: "not, as in film, predominantly physical, but psychological--both sight and sound serving to give overt support to the covert expression of the mind" (Siepmann 357). The flexibility of the camera allowed directors to expand their simplified stage settings to include a realistic sense of movement and changing environment. And the camera followed actors around the studio and across different locales while keeping the characters and actions at an engaging distance. The effect of such kinetic eavesdropping left the audience with a sense of having overheard part of another person's life.

In his contribution to the anthology How to Write and Direct for Television (1952), Paddy Chayefsky elaborated:

> In television, there is practically nothing too subtle or delicate that you cannot examine with your camera. The camera allows us a degree of intimacy that can never be achieved on stage. Realism in the theatre is a stylized business; what one achieves is really the effect of realism. In television, you can be literally and freely real. The scenes can be played as if the actors were unaware of their audience. The dialogue can sound as if it had been wiretapped. The writer has a whole new, untouched area of drama in which to poke about. He can write about the simplest things, the smallest incidents, as long as they have dramatic significance. (45)

Tad Mosel says much the same thing when he points out that the medium encouraged the dramatist to focus on one or

two people or a situation in which the events were ordinary: "Never before has there been a medium so suited to what I call the 'personal drama'--that is, a play wherein the writer explores one simple happening, a day, or even an hour, and tries to suggest a complete life" (ix). Television critic Ned Hoopes further explains that the conditions in which television drama was received by viewers made it a prime medium for communicating character rather than intricate or complicated plots. Successful television drama must appeal to a diverse audience who will be responding to what they see based on many different frames of reference. Whereas movies and stage plays hope to evoke a unified response, playwrights of television plays consider the wide variety of attitudes that will be present in their audiences. Consequently, the television plays focus more on character than plot, setting, or even theme. Its goal as a psychoanlytical medium is to make a dominant impression in a highly compressed form (10-11).

Thus, television's ability to bring intimate details of a performance to its audience, along with the practical constraints of staging live drama, made it a perfect medium for the character-based play. When Fred Coe named his ten all-time favorite productions, he selected two works by Horton Foote, The Trip To Bountiful and Young Lady of Property, because of their uniquely realistic depiction of human character and emotion. Clearly, Foote's triumph in

television drama was the result of a perfect marriage of material and medium. The majority of early TV audiences consisted of the middle class who responded to plays that spoke simply and compassionately about their lives, and Foote created effective and moving characters with which his audience could identify. Part of the audience's strong sense of recognition was due to the author's own identification with his material. The terrain of his writings was the home of the Southern family, and the action of his plays always centered around domestic situations. Set in the imaginary Texas Gulf Coast town of Harrison, reminiscent of his birthplace, Foote's stories depicted people he had known as a child in Wharton: "This is my familiar country . . . Its people are my people. I write of them with affection, certainly, and I hope understanding" (Harrison, Texas viii). His characters were "the very young and the very old," native to his homeland, and his themes were common to all: a happy or unhappy acceptance of life by the young and a preparation for death by the old. Many of his new plays were in fact variations on plots, characters, and themes which had surfaced years earlier; Foote continued his exploration of the moral and social history of Wharton while creating a world out of his own imagination. It is little wonder that Foote became known in early television as the "Checkov of the Texas small-town" (Coe 87).

Another important dimension of Foote's work argued well for its success. From the beginning, he had been attracted to the simplicity and economy of the one-act play form, making his plots easily modified to fit the hour format. He gained an understanding of the pressures and demands peculiar to the medium, including a sense of the mobility available from the television camera; but he believed that most cinematic techniques had already been absorbed into the craft of playwriting. The key to mastering television was not the craftsman's knowledge of how to overcome limitations but how to use the medium's greatest potential: "For me, drama in its best sense is a form of concentration. I have found that sometimes limitations are a great asset. One of the great hindrances is an overindulgence, having too much to choose from, too much to work with. Sometimes when you are forced to be economical, especially in the setting, and through compressing your material, the characters, and the plot, you can clarify and intensify the drama" (qtd. in Yellin and Connors 21). Intimacy was the word most often used to describe the nature of television drama, and Foote's success in great measure came from his understanding that the television camera could probe beneath the surface of external action for the more profound truths of human relationships.

One of Foote's early teleplays, The Old Beginning, reveals much about the writer's method. Based upon the

playwright's memory of his grandfather and uncle, the piece explores the troubled relationship of H.T. Mavis, a wealthy real estate agent, and his son Tommy. Set in Harrison, Texas, during the 1950s, the story reflects the problems that social change brings to families. Once a quiet and stable community which served the cotton industry and its plantation society, Harrison is giving way to a new order of capitalism that few citizens can understand. H.T. Mavis, a stubborn and temperamental man, represents a breed of businessman who values money and professional success above even the needs of his family. For years, Tommy has tried to please his father by learning the real estate business; but Mavis merely responds with aggression and hostility. When the play opens, Mavis has given his son a building to lease, which Tommy rents to a friend and local businessman. When Mavis discovers that Tommy has asked only fifty dollars a month, he rents the same building to a stranger for three times the amount and then reprimands the boy for his lack of insight and business sense. We later discover that the person with whom he has done business is a madman who travels the country falsely renting property from gullible businessmen. Mavis begs his son's forgiveness, but he is too late. Tommy recognizes his need for independence from his father; and as the play concludes, he leaves home to fulfill that need.

The conflict between a father and his son, explored in drama throughout history, was as timely a subject for Foote's audience as for those of the past. In The Old Beginning, Foote depicts a family torn apart by a father's obsessive drive for wealth. Like Mamie Borden in Only The Heart, H.T. Mavis is found wanting as a parent. We get to know him through conversations with his business clients and with his family, interchanges that are brief but telling. Mavis is a man in the midst of a crisis. Like many of his generation, he takes pride in his job and his financial success; but he has become so obsessed with work that he neglects his parental responsibility. Mavis' actions are characteristic of many during this period of materialistic ambition, who sought success regardless of the personal cost. Mavis sacrifices his son's need for a father to Mavis' own need for material achievement. In Tommy, Foote gives us a vivid picture of a young man torn between loyalty and affection for his father and a desire to be his own man. Characteristically, the playwright humanizes these characters with subtle, rather than histrionic expressions of action: "I'm not angry with Dad anymore. Only I can't work with him. He wants everything his way and maybe he's right. Anyway I know I'll never be able to stand being bossed the rest of my life" (Harrison, Texas 40). Tommy's realization leaves him with an uncertain future, a common experience for many young people.

One of Foote's most enduring plays of that era is The Trip To Bountiful. The playwright recalls that the television production of The Trip To Bountiful was initiated by a phone call from Fred Coe in February 1953: "Coe had an advertising agency he had to respond to, so he'd ask writers to give him a general idea and he'd get clearance before they started on a project. Well, I was maybe superstitious, but I felt that if I told someone beforehand it would kill it for me. So I wrote 'Bountiful' and then went to see Fred. I said I was working on a story about an old woman who wanted to get back to her home town. He said, 'Fine, let's do it,' and the next day I gave him the play" (Foote interview, 18 Nov. 1988). On March 1 of that year, The Trip To Bountiful premiered on the Goodyear Television Playhouse with Lillian Gish as Mrs. Watts, John Beal as her son Ludie, Eileen Heckart as Jessie Mae, Eva Marie Saint as Thelma; the director was Vincent Donehue. Telephones rang all over the NBC Studio after it aired. People said, "God bless you, Miss Gish,' and 'Thank God we've found you again," and the chairman of CBS, William Paley, even called to remark that "television came of age tonight" (Foote interview, 18 Nov. 1988). Because of the extraordinary spontaneous response to the play, only two weeks later Foote was asked by Fred Coe and the Theatre Guild to adapt the work for the stage. On November 3, 1953, The Trip To Bountiful played at Henry Miller's Theatre in New York; and in 1954, it was performed

on Broadway under the direction of Stella Holt. Forty-two years later (1985), it was transformed into an Academy-Award winning film, starring Geraldine Page (see Chapter 4).

Throughout its transformations, The Trip To Bountiful has retained its poignant story of Mrs. Carrie Watts and her desperate journey back to Bountiful. The impulse behind the story was a legend in the Foote family of an aunt who, as a young girl, was not allowed to marry the man she loved because they were first cousins. Heartbroken, they each married others; and years later, the woman returned as a widow to her hometown of Wharton, where each day the spurned man would pass her house and bow with affection. Foote recalls, "When I knew this woman, she seemed so unlikely to have had a past like that. She was living in rather humiliating circumstances at the time but doing it with a great deal of dignity" (Foote interview, 18 Nov. 1988).

Indeed, what best characterizes Carrie Watts is her drive to retain her sense of dignity after a lifetime of hardships and sacrifice. For more than twenty years, Mrs. Watts has resided with her son Ludie and his shrewish wife Jessie Mae in a cramped, noisy apartment in Houston. She is a loving and well-meaning woman; but as her children know from experience, living with her is not easy. They have a small income and no privacy and are ill-equipped to deal with the memories, lost dreams, and sheer indomitable spirit of the woman. Ludie and Jessie Mae are childless and

reluctantly approaching middle age. After a year's illness, Ludie has only recently gotten a job in the city; and Jessie Mae has begun to veil her discontentment and frustration by frequenting the beauty parlor, reading movie magazines, sipping Coke, and arguing with Mrs. Watts over the whereabouts of her monthly pension check. Ludie tries to maintain peace in the family, but he is inevitably caught between his affections for his mother and his wife, who continually have their petty clashes. Loving both women, he is unable to satisfy either. Mrs. Watts is no more fond of the familial arrangement than her son or daughter-in-law. Life for her has become a claustrophobic and harsh existence of forced politeness, senseless battles, and demanded apologies. She is miserable in the city with its noisy radios, irate neighbors, and screeching automobiles; and she aches to see her beloved homeplace Bountiful before she dies. Many times she has tried to slip away from Ludie and Jessie Mae in order to return to her rural home where she grew up, married, and buried two children. Now her heart is unreliable and her need has grown more urgent. As the play progresses, she manages to escape and catch a bus back to Bountiful. Helped by kindly strangers that she meets along the way, Mrs. Watts finally achieves her goal; but when she arrives, she finds that the town of Bountiful has long since been abandoned and gone to waste. The house in which she once lived is desolate and run down. But Mrs. Watts finds

the strength to confront her memories, respond to the healing rhythms of the land, and regain her dignity before returning to Houston, now more able to face the humiliations of life and to prepare for her death.

The Trip To Bountiful captures vividly and touchingly a number of universal truths about the human experience. The play pays tribute to the decency of common people who barely scrape by but endure amid trying circumstances. It also reminds us of the importance of family loyalty, of the need for compassion for the elderly, and of the necessity of squaring up memories with reality before completing life's journey. Most importantly, The Trip To Bountiful expresses the universal human longing for a spiritual and emotional home. Bountiful is rich with family history and memories from which Mrs. Watts can never fully escape. She is connected to the land; it defines her identity, holds the record of her personal struggles, and offers her strength against an unfair and troubled world. For her, the power of Bountiful exists not in the houses that were erected there, the farms that were carved into the earth, or even the people who once inhabited this small Texas community, but rather in the very soil and air of which it is composed: "Pretty soon it'll all be gone. Ten years . . . twenty . . . this house . . . me . . . you . . . But the river will be here. The fields. The woods. The smell of the Gulf. That's what I always took my strength from, Ludie. Not from

houses, not from people. It's so quiet. It's so eternally quiet. I had forgotten the peace. The quiet. And it's given me strength once more, Ludie. . . . I've found my dignity and my strength." (64) For Carrie Watts, Bountiful represents a profound source of nourishment, a place that will outlast time and preserve the memories of her life long after she has succumbed to death.

Her son Ludie, who probably could have been a successful farmer rather than a struggling office worker, also gains strength from contact with the land. Foote created the character of Ludie from the memory of his maternal uncle who, according to the playwright, was representative of that whole generation of country people who after the Depression migrated to the city: "When I was about twelve I remember visiting him and seeing a book on his nightstand entitled How To Be An Executive. Here was a man who had been taken out of the rural environment and put into an alien society to deal with things in which he had no training. I'm sure he must have felt helpless and alienated at times, but he was trying his best to adapt and provide for his family" (Foote interview, 18 Nov. 1988). For Ludie, the old homeplace holds painful recollections; but as he remembers his past, he is better able to empathize with his mother and to reenter the urban struggle for a decent life.

Foote's scenes of small town family life depict an American way that seems to be disappearing. Fewer people

spend their entire lives in a single small town; more and more migrate to pursue careers. The landscape itself seems to be losing its regionalism and particularities to the steamroller of the interstate highway and the tin sheet of the prefabricated building. At the time Foote wrote The Trip To Bountiful, the rural social and cultural environment was giving way to the New World of machines and urban landscapes; with this change, came a growing sense of personal alienation and loneliness, and a loss of family loyalty and tradition.

One of the central themes of Foote's teleplays is the human rootlessness of the modern world, as exemplified in A Young Lady of Property (which aired on the Philco Playhouse on April 5, 1953). Foote explains that the play was based on an unforgettable childhood experience:

> When I was fourteen I read in the Houston papers about a Hollywood scout arriving in that city to look for acting talent. I talked my parents into letting me go to meet him, and my grandmother and one of her sons drove me in for an appointment. I don't know what I expected from all this, but there was little talk of a screen test when I had my interview, but only of lessons, including, as I remember, tap dancing. I had rather conventional ideas of what a Hollywood scout should look like and the young man I interviewed looked very unHollywood to me, looking like one of my uncles and talking as if he had never been out of Houston, Texas. What real use all of this was to me I was unaware of then, but the experience, given to a young girl eager to go to Hollywood, was used in A Young Lady of Property. ("Seeing and Imagining" 21-22)

Drawing upon the memory of this incident, Foote created a drama that centers on the growing pains of a motherless teenage girl, Wilma Thompson, caught between her yearning to

escape small-town life and become a movie star and her desire to bring up a family in the empty house she inherited from her deceased mother.

Foote's dramatic world is peopled with youngsters who have lost either a father or mother or both. Such is the case with Wilma Thompson whose mother has recently died and whose father, a recovering gambler, is on the verge of remarrying a woman his daughter rejects. Mr. Thompson, busy with his own problems and affairs, has left Wilma to her own devices and in the care of two other lonely people: Miss Gert, her aunt, and Minna Boyd, her confidant and Negro maid. When the play opens, Wilma, overwhelmed by the loss of her mother and the jealously she feels about her father's new relationship with Sybil Leighton, has retreated into fantasies of Hollywood stardom and secretly plotted with her closest friend, Arabella Cookenboo, to secure a screen test from a Hollywood casting agent, a test she never takes. Wilma believes she can be happy as a film star; but as she discovers, dreams cannot substitute for real needs: "Maybe I was going to Hollywood out of pure lonesomeness . . . Daddy could have taken away my lonesomeness, but he didn't want to or couldn't" (A Young Lady of Property 18). The young girl's fear and loneliness grows when her father attempts to sell the old family home without her knowledge. In a frantic effort to salvage the only link between herself and her dead mother, Wilma confronts her future step-mother and

asks for help. To the child's surprise, Mrs. Leighton empathizes with her and convinces Mr. Thompson not to sell the house. At last, Wilma realizes that her real ambition is not to become a star at all but to stay in Harrison, bring up a family, and do something about the lonesome look of the family home. For the time being, she is content as a young woman of property; but whether she is able to fill the house with life again, we never know. Nevertheless, Wilma Thompson has taken her first step toward adulthood.

No retelling of the story can give an adequate idea of the play's essence, for Horton Foote is an evocative stylist. In his intimate scenes centered around the Thompson family, he invests familiar domestic situations and ordinary folk, both white and black, with an appealing warmth. When the play premiered on television, the cast featured Joanne Woodward as Arabella Cookenboo and Kim Stanley, in her first starring role as Wilma. Fred Coe proclaimed it to be "one of the most distinguished performances in the history of television" (Coe 88). Coe also acknowledged that the structure of A Young Lady of Property was unique to the medium. Rather than showing Wilma's climactic confrontation with Mrs. Leighton, in which she regains her home and develops a much needed relationship with her step-mother, Foote chose to have the young girl relate the incident through dialogue. As Coe explains, "When Foote wrote this play, he omitted what is virtually a must scene in any work-

-that scene where the issues are resolved and the climax is drawn. We had many arguments about this. He wanted the girl to come before the camera and explain the situation, face to face with the audience. I wanted him to write the action instead of having a character talk about it. He won his point: We did it the way he wrote it. He was right. We broke all the rules, and everything turned out wonderfully. But it could never have happened except on television" (88).

The next two works Foote wrote for NBC, The Oil Well and Expectant Relations, present variations on characters and themes that had appeared in his earlier stage plays. The Oil Well, which aired on the Goodyear Theatre on May 17, 1953, examines the degeneration of values and loss of intimacy that accompany an old man's desire for wealth. Will Thornton, the central figure of the piece, is a man who dreams of becoming rich and fails, but who cannot surrender his hope for a better life. Will, a simple cotton farmer, has lost his pride and faith in his once noble profession. For more than twenty-eight years, he has held on to the dream that someday oil would be discovered under his land, that he would no longer have to break his back farming, and that he could give his family anything they desired: a gas range, a television, a business, and a chauffeured car. However, Will's attempts to provide a more substantial life for his family have failed. He owes $10,000 from the first time he thought he was going to strike oil, and paying off

the loan has drained his family of their resources and strength. As the action unfolds, Will is given the opportunity to get out of debt by leasing his farm to a reputable oil company or selling the land's mineral rights for $100,000 to H.T. Mavis who is trying to transform the rural Harrison landscape into a profitable resource. Will's wife, Loula, urges him to accept Mavis' offer; but the old man chooses, instead, to hold out for more money. Of course, there is no oil; and when Mavis recounts his offer, Will is finally forced to face the reality that life does not always turn out the way one hopes: "Why does this come to a man? He's led on to believe, to expect . . . and then everything is knocked out of his hands. His hopes are dashed. There is failure again . . . I can't go through it any more. I can't. It's better not to expect, not to hope" (Selected One-Act Plays 129).

What Will does not realize is that his wife and children love him regardless of his failure in the business world. And as he ultimately discovers, they hold the key to his future happiness and contentment. Will has withdrawn from his family and lost his closeness to the land, but his wife shares the same agrarian ideal as Carrie Watts in The Trip To Bountiful. Loula believes in the healing power of work and responds to the beneficent quality of the rural setting. Although she wants Will to have his oil well, they've been disappointed too many times before, and she

knows that only the land and a crop in the ground can be counted on to feed them and keep a roof over their heads. As the play concludes, she offers Will a way to cope with his feelings of personal failure.

> Mrs. Thornton: Cry. Get it all out. It's better to let it come out, then you'll be tired and able to sleep, and in the morning you'll be rested and can get on with the work to be done here.
>
> Will: Yes'm. But I won't ever hope again, Loula. I can't. There's too much hurt when it doesn't happen. Do you hear that Loula?
>
> Mrs. Thornton: Yes, I hear you. You think that now. But you won't stop hoping. You can't. And I wouldn't want you any other way. Not any other way in the world. (129)

Finally, as in most of Foote's plays, there is a sense of continuity and hope in The Oil Well. Although the end of the play is really only the beginning of more difficult hardships and sacrifices for the Thornton family, at least they have accepted the life they have and can now move ahead together.

Expectant Relations also explores the disintegration of family relationships and loss of moral values that accompany an obsession with money. The play, which aired on the Goodyear Playhouse June 21, 1953, bears many resemblances to "The Girls," a farcical comedy written by Foote twelve years earlier. Here again, two selfish women are in preparation for the death of a rich relative who they believe will leave them a large inheritance. Their hopes are ultimately dashed when they recognize that the relative has no intention of

meeting their expectations. The action of "The Girls" revolves around two spinster sisters, Sue and Nora Anthony, and their strained relationship with a shrewish and niggardly aunt. Expectant Relations, on the other hand, introduces us to two selfish cousins who engage in a competition for the money of their long-lived uncle. The central character, Fannie Jackson, for twenty-five years has been supporting her son and daughter-in-law with the money her husband left the family. Now Fannie faces an economic crisis; her savings have been spent, and the Harrison bank is pressuring her to sell her house. Like many of Foote's female characters, Fannie has led a sheltered life and knows nothing about hard work or making important decisions. Each time she decides to sell the house, she receives a telegram from Uncle Samuel Edward telling her that he will be coming to visit soon; and each time Fannie reads her uncle's letter she changes her mind in hopes that he will provide the money she needs. Cousin Lucy Dove, Fannie's vindictive and greedy counterpart, also expects a large reward, and for years has been competing with Fannie for the favors of Uncle Samuel Edward. This delicate balance of family relationships overturns when both Fannie and Lucy Dove receive identical letters from their uncle inviting himself to their homes for supper on the same night. But Uncle Samuel Edward never appears, forcing both women to acknowledge that the old man has merely been playing a game with them. In the end,

Fannie recognizes the absurdity of her actions, accepts her fate, and puts her house up for sale. Lucy Dove, on the other hand, refuses to face the truth and plots to have her uncle committed before he can remarry and leave his money to another woman.

An effective comedy, Expectant Relations achieves its humor from Foote's detailed depiction of the ludicrous behavior of two recognizable but unlikable characters. Certainly, we laugh at the misdirected ambitions and petty faults of Fannie Jackson and Lucy Dove Murray and admire Uncle Samuel Edward's ability to frustrate and outwit them at the game of life. But beneath the obvious humor of the play, serious overtones emerge. These two women, once wealthy aristocrats who commanded the respect and love of their family and community, have become so obsessed with money and security that they have reduced themselves to mere scavengers. Their limited visions have turned them into unsympathetic and embittered old women who neither respect the feelings of others nor consider the value of human life. What prevents the play from being a cynical black comedy is the hope that Fannie becomes enlightened from her experience: "The lesson has been bitterly learned for the millionth time. The Bible says get wisdom, get understanding. It might have said be practical. From now on I intend to try to be" (Harrison, Texas 140). Expectant Relations failed to gain the kind of positive response from

television viewers that Foote's earlier teleplays had achieved, perhaps because the central characters of the play are less sympathetic and their conflict less familiar. This was the only comedy he would write for NBC.

His next two plays, The Death of the Old Man and The Tears of My Sister, premiered on the Gulf Playhouse in July and August of 1953. Directed by Arthur Penn, both were experiments in the use of the subjective camera, a technique whereby the television camera would itself be a character whose voice is heard but never seen by the audience. While this approach offered a new and unique perspective from which to view the action of TV drama, the beauty of the two plays lies in the dignity of their characters and the accuracy of their language. In The Death of the Old Man, the camera is Will Thornton, an old man who lies helpless on his death bed, unable to communicate to anyone around him, but who nonetheless relates his random thoughts and desperate concerns to the audience. Throughout his life, Will has been a pillar of hope and strength to his family, serving as both father and mother to his own children as well as to those of his brother and cousin. His home was open to everyone, because he believed in the kindness of his family and of the world. Instead of saving money or fretting about the future, Will invested his resources in "livin' things" and provided care and stability for less fortunate people; consequently, he has sacrificed his dreams

and children's security for the comfort of his extended family. Now he is dying without owning his house or having any money left for his only daughter, Rosa, who has cared for him. His concern for Rosa's happiness and prosperity is the tender thread that keeps Will alive and drives the play to its ultimate conclusion.

Foote portrays women with great insight, understanding, and admiration. Through the character of Rosa Thornton, he reveals his compassion for those women who have been victimized by their families and by the harshness of life. When the play begins, Rosa is over fifty years old, unmarried, and financially insecure. Having faced the death of her boyfriend in World War I and her mother's fatal illness, she has become withdrawn and dependent on her father. She once tried to make a life of her own in the business world only to be verbally and emotionally abused by her boss. In an effort to ease her pain and growing sense of inadequacy, she slowly began to place the needs of her younger brothers before her own. Rosa insisted that her brothers get an education; and to make that possible, she baked cakes and sold preserves to put them through college. Through her efforts, Tom and Jack were able to create a happy and prosperous life for themselves; but the affection Rosa gave her brothers and the sacrifices she made for them proved to be one-sided. Tom and Jack have no room in their lives for a needy sister, and they refuse to share their

prosperity with her. Will Thornton's hope that his sons would remember Rosa's loyalty and return her love is dashed by a devastating fear that "kindness has gone from the world, generosity has vanished" (Harrison, Texas 106).

Indeed, The Death of the Old Man is one of Foote's darkest portraits of a world in transition. Gone are the innocent days of "the honeysuckle and the china berry and the figs an' the dew berry" (98). Gone, too, are the virtues of familial devotion, solidarity, and empathy. As Sealy, the black servant and silent guardian of the Thornton family, sadly admits, "the world changes. . . . Oh, yes, it changes. The young ladies are fillin' up the courthouse now typin' and workin' like the men. Aeroplanes in the sky and so many wars I can't keep up with them, Mr. Will. It's everybody for himself, now, the women and the men, the brothers against the brothers" (102).

In the dark world of this play, familial love has almost disappeared from the earth; but in one quick brush stroke, Foote offers a thread of hope in the character of Cousin Lyd, who unexpectedly arrives to be with Will when he dies. Because of her respect for the old man and her gratitude for his help years earlier, Cousin Lyd offers Rosa and Sealy a home in the country and a business from which they can squeeze out a modest living. Will Thornton is finally rewarded for a lifetime of generosity; although the remainder of his daughter's life may be difficult and

lonely, the old man can now die peacefully, free of worry and guilt, assured that Rosa will be provided for. Finally, we see Will's faith in his family reaffirmed; Rosa, Lyd, and Sealy recapture a sense of togetherness and gain the peace and contentment so important to Foote's characters.

While The Death of the Old Man combines a sense of loss with a wishful feeling of family harmony, The Tears of My Sister suggests the endless pain and sorrow of adolescent girls growing up in the broken world of their parents. Horton Foote has often centered his interest on the yearnings and fears of young women and the effect that economics and chaotic social conditions have on their hopes and aspirations for marriage. Because of the admiration he felt for his mother, it was inevitable that the playwright should be preoccupied with the practical difficulties and pitfalls of marriage in a time of deprivation and despair. The Tears of My Sister is one of Foote's darkest representations of this theme. The central character of the play is Cecelia Monroe who, represented by the camera, shares with the audience her interpretation of the distressing circumstances surrounding the marriage of her older sister and her confusion over Bessie's unhappiness. Bessie, twenty years old and clearly of marriageable age by society's standards, is engaged to Stacey Davis, a man she does not love. Bessie's mother strongly supports her daughter's marriage to Stacey because he is rich and can

offer her daughter a better life. Mrs. Monroe, broken from the recent death of her husband and by the frustrations of having to be both father and mother to her children, believes that when Bessie is married, her life will become less burdensome. She and Cecelia can sell the ramshackled boarding house they now operate in Harrison and return to Houston to begin a more productive life. Marriage has become little more than a shortcut to financial security for Mrs. Monroe (as it was for Mamie Borden in Only The Heart); and Bessie, like Julia in Foote's earlier play, is about to marry a man she cares nothing about because as she admits, "My Mama and my sister need me and I have to think of my Mama and my sister" (Harrison, Texas 92). Thus, the conflict between romantic love and practicality is played out, for Bessie is deeply devoted to another boy, Syd Davis, whom her mother rejects. Bessie considers running away with Syd, but her sense of family duty and loyalty prevent her from doing so; instead, she cries the nights away in an expression of loneliness and pain. Time and again Foote suggests that risk-taking and individual fulfillment are essential elements in marriage and among lovers, but Bessie possesses neither the understanding nor the courage to risk all for love. At the play's climax, Syd appears at Bessie's window and calls her name; but the young girl can only echo the sentiments of her mother: "We have to be practical in this world, honey. We have to be practical" (92).

The Tears of My Sister, a remarkable study of young women at a crucial stage in their lives, reveals Foote's understanding of the need for human companionship as well as the deceptive manner in which women often view their roles as wives and lovers. Perhaps the most telling example of this is Cecelia's recounting of her mother's belief that "men understand not a thing about the sorrows of women. She says it just scares them. She says all men want women to be regular doll babies all the time. Happy and good-natured with no troubles" (88). Mrs. Monroe's image of womanhood is not presented satirically but as a given, a crucial reality of a world where money is valued more than affection and women are idolized but seldom understood. Ultimately, Mrs. Monroe emerges as a long-suffering woman of resolution and fortitude, who wants the best for Bessie even though she unwittingly sacrifices her daughter's happiness. The play's tragic events are not precipitated by a flaw in her character but by a society that refuses to acknowledge human rights or the transcendent power of love.

Throughout his plays, Horton Foote depicts early twentieth-century society as disordered and rarely shows family relationships as harmonious. Instead, he has created a host of defective parents and violated children who are the result of a sterile and destructive society. Indeed, Foote has consistently focused his attention on children of indifferent or self-serving parents, those corrupted by the

misplaced values of parents, those exploited to assume parental responsibilities, and children who have been orphaned. So frequently do these characters appear that they serve as a unifying design in his writings. With none of his fictive children has Foote identified more fully than with the orphans. His interest in lonely and alienated children is, of course, the result of a strong identification with his father, who was himself abandoned at a young age. With the memory of his father's neglected childhood never to fade, Foote often created a world peopled by orphans, homeless victims of societal indifference and familial neglect.

Foote's work John Turner Davis, which aired on NBC's Philco Playhouse on November 15, 1953, told the story of an abandoned twelve-year-old boy and his search for a family. The play is set in 1933 during the height of the Great Depression. Times are extremely difficult in Harrison; many families have been devastated by economic collapse, and the hot Texas sun has destroyed any hope for a productive cotton crop. As the play opens, John Turner Davis, a child of migrant farmers, has been abandoned by his parents because of their inability to care for him. Left with his aunt and uncle, also migrants, John Turner has survived his loneliness and pain by working hard and by holding onto the hope that one day his parents will return. But, they never come for the boy, and to make matters worse, the boy's aunt

and uncle also desert him because they, too, are unable to provide a home for him. John Turner is suddenly forced into the role of an orphan and cast adrift in a hostile world. However, his conflict is resolved with the help of Hazel and Thurman Whyte, a childless couple who take pity on the boy and offer him a refuge of love and security. Initially, the boy refuses to accept the couple's kindness, insisting that his relatives will come back for him. Slowly he comes to accept the fact that his family has indeed left him behind. Finally, as the much needed rain begins to fall upon the parched Harrison landscape, John Turner turns to the couple who have befriended him and expresses his hope for a better life: "Thank you. All my life I wanted to live in a house. I reckon I could get used to livin' in a house same as anyone" (Harrison, Texas 73).

Perhaps Foote was so successful a television writer because his characters and themes reflected the growing sense of rootlessness and disconnection that was so much a part of the 1950s sensibility. The postwar family experienced great change primarily as the result of the diffusion of affluence and the consumer culture which developed after World War II. The American economy was at an all-time high with almost one hundred percent employment; however, at the same time, Americans feared the possibility of nuclear disaster in a cold war. Many adults, preoccupied

with material and social success, relegated family responsibilities to second place (Leuchtenburg 678).

Psychoanalyst Eric Fromm used the term "marketing orientation" to refer to the ideas held by many people in the new consumer culture. These people felt that their acceptability hinged on how well they could sell themselves in the market, how well they could "package" themselves (752). The inherent danger in this philosophy was that it encouraged children to meet the expectations of others (such as peer groups or even strangers in the mass media) rather than hold to traditional values (753). Foote understood the devastating effects of this mindset on the children of that generation; and in a very real sense, his intimate domestic dramas held a mirror to the lives of television viewers and offered them a realistic glimpse of the unpleasant truths of the age.

Before Television Playhouse concluded its 1953 season, Foote had two other plays produced on NBC. The first of these, The Rocking Chair, offered a brief character sketch Foote had written in 1948 while working at the King-Smith School in Washington, D.C. Like much of his writings from this earlier period, The Rocking Chair is concerned with personal commitment to family and community. The action centers around Whyte Ewing, an aging doctor, who has decided to retire from public service after fifty-five years of caring for the people of Richmond, Texas. His retirement is

an event for which his wife has long awaited; for years, Loula has urged her husband to give up his practice and join her at home where they can live the remainder of their lives together in peace and quiet. The old man has finally promised to abide by her wishes even though he is reluctant to forsake the many old and dispossessed people who need him and who cannot afford the medical fees of the younger, less personable doctors. As the play progresses, Ewing discovers that he is an irreplaceable part of the community; for only he can provide the kind of personal care and attention that his patients need. He comes to realize that he is friend as well as doctor to the people of Richmond, and his friendship is an important remedy for their pain and suffering. Ultimately, Ewing does not retire; he sacrifices his own dreams and those of his wife for the betterment of the town and, by doing so, suggests that duty and devotion to other people are essential to human happiness.

Foote's final teleplay of the year, The Midnight Caller, proved to be his most controversial work for early television. As the playwright explained to Terry Barr in a 1985 interview, both audience and media critics "strongly objected to the play and wanted it censored because of its inference of pre-marital relations" (Barr 90). Typically, Foote did not pander to public taste; instead, he chose to present the play as he had created it. Aired on Philco Television Playhouse on December 13, 1953, the play

presented one of the most candid representations of love relationships gone awry that television audiences had seen. In The Midnight Caller, Foote returned to many of the situations and characters he had explored earlier in The Tears of My Sister. The crisis of the story is brought about by parents who want to dominate their children, and the action revolves around a young woman, Helen Crews, who finds herself caught in love's emotional entanglements. The play opens in Mrs. Crawford's boarding house in Harrison, Texas, where Helen Crews has just moved in with Alma Jean Jordon, Cutie Spencer, and Miss Rowena Douglas, three lonely women who become reluctant witnesses to the tragic effects of Helen's failed romance. Through their conversations, we learn that Helen had once been engaged to Harvey Weems but that her dream of marriage was shattered when Helen's mother, in an effort to control her daughter's life, forbade the young lovers to see each other. Mrs. Weems, who disapproved of her son's choice of mates, convinced Harvey to break off the engagement. For four years, the couple tried to sustain their relationship by disobeying their parents and meeting secretly. In time, however, they were unable to overcome the obstacles to their love and Helen's feelings for the young man changed. On numerous occasions, she had tried to end the relationship but Harvey had been unable to dismiss his passion for Helen. He turned to alcohol as a panacea for his loneliness; and now, every

evening at midnight, he comes to Helen's window to call out her name and proclaim his undying love. The couple's unhealthy attachment has had tragic effects. Harvey has become a hopeless drunk who, during the course of the play, tries to commit suicide; and Helen has been condemned by her family and community as a fallen woman. But unlike The Tears of My Sister, The Midnight Caller does not end in futility and total despair.

Helen faces her sorrow and accepts the truth that with or without love a person is ultimately responsible for his or her own happiness. By giving up her attempt to save Harvey from his own destruction, Helen can move on with her life and return the affections of another man, Ralph Johnston. As the play ends, she escapes the stifling world of Harrison and begins a new and happier life as Ralph's bride. But the joy that surrounds Helen's departure is shadowed by the melancholy loneliness left behind. We are reminded of Rowena, Cutie, and Alma Jean and their hopeless search for peace, contentment, and meaning in their lives; and we are brought back to the tragedy of Harvey Weems as he screams Helen's name from the jail cell where he waits to be taken to the asylum. While some people found The Midnight Caller unsuitable material for television viewing, it continues to be one of Foote's most realistic portraits of the limitations of love and the mysterious nature of human relationships.

By the end of 1953, Horton Foote's career in television seemed secure. His plays had earned him a celebrity far greater than that experienced by most writers for the stage or film; audiences looked forward to the next Foote drama with an enthusiasm usually reserved for the appearance of a star. But Foote had grown tired of the strenuous demands of television writing, because, as he later explained, "I wrote ten plays between 1953 and 1954; I was exhausted. I just didn't have any more plays in me. You can't just crank them out. I had been storing them up over the years and, when they were gone, I wasn't going to just sit down and hack something out. Frankly, I don't think that good writing could ever continue in that pace" (Foote interview, 18 Nov. 1988). During the 1954 season NBC produced only two Foote plays, The Dancers and The Shadow of Will Greer.

The most impressive of these works was The Dancers, which aired on the Philco Television Playhouse on March 7, 1954. Based on family legend, the play centers on one of Foote's favorite themes, the adolescent's search for identity and companionship. Young Horace, a boy of sixteen, has journeyed to Harrison to visit his sister and brother-in-law, Inez and Herman Stanley. When he arrives, Horace discovers that Inez has been busy arranging a date for him to a dance with Emily Crews, the prettiest girl in town and the daughter of her closest friend. Horace, reluctant to go, claims that he does not know how to dance; but Inez,

after a bit of coaching, persuades him to call on Emily even though she knows that the young girl is going steady with another boy. In the Crew's parlor, waiting for his date to appear, Horace discovers that Emily's mother disapproves of her daughter's boyfriend and is forcing her to go to the dance with him in an effort to drive a wedge between the couple. Humiliated, Horace flees the scene and takes refuge in the Harrison drug store, where he meets Mary Catherine Davis, a young girl who, like himself, lacks confidence and is crippled by her feelings of inadequacy and unattractiveness. The two lonely youths are drawn to each other, and Horace invites Mary Catherine to go with him to the next dance. Ironically, at the moment the young man finds the courage to ask Mary Catherine for a date, his sister and Mrs. Crews arrange for him to escort Emily (who has chosen to cooperate this time because she regrets the way she treated Horace). But Horace refuses to take Emily; he wants to take Mary Catherine, and nothing, not even the pleas of his sister, will prevent him from escorting his new sweetheart. As the two are about to leave for the dance, they admit to each other their anxieties over not being popular and not being good dancers. But secure in the knowledge that they respect and care for each other, they begin their first dance with more confidence and happiness than they have ever felt before.

The Dancers treats the ordinary trials of young people with honesty, sensitivity, and compassion. As with so many of Foote's adolescent characters, Horace and Mary Catherine begin their road to shared happiness and self discovery when they are able to trust each other and admit their common fears. That their story ends happily testifies to the playwright's belief that caring breeds confidence, and that young people, if given the opportunity to find their own way in the world, will most often "be all right" (Selected One-Act Plays 202). Another equally significant aspect of the play demonstrates the healing power of intimacy and human contact. Dance has always played a significant role in Horton Foote's drama; and in The Dancers, the playwright not only employs the principles of dance but also the indelible image of the dance itself to give depth and meaning to his characters. As Gerald Wood explains, "In the dance a more physical and emotional side of human experience is released; intimacy becomes possible. But the movements of the dance are also governed by the rules of the form. Dance balances feeling with order, desire with tradition. In The Dancers, as in other plays by Foote, the dance is a precious, fleeting time when private desires and public needs, sensual spirits and fraternal affections are brought into harmony. It's as close as his characters get to a transcendent moment" (234).

In the spring of 1954, Foote took a brief but important leave from NBC; the reasons for his departure were both professional and personal. Weary of churning out a teleplay every month without sufficient time for thought and preparation, he wanted desperately to return to the stage, which had a prestige surpassing any other performing medium. If a writer, no matter how successful elsewhere, wanted to be considered serious, then his work had to be tested on the legitimate stage. With this in mind, he began work on one of the most important plays of his career, The Traveling Lady. Unfortunately, his writing was halted by the distressing news that his Grandmother Brooks had passed away. Her death on April 29, 1954, left Foote and his family in a state of shock and grief; and it took time for the playwright to overcome the loss of this gracious matriarch who had been so dear to him.

It was not until the fall of 1954 that Foote was able to complete a final draft of The Traveling Lady. On October 27, the play premiered at The Neighborhood Playhouse in New York, under the direction of Vincent Donehue and with a notable cast that featured Jack Lord as Slim Murray and Kim Stanley as Georgette Thomas (a role which boosted the actress to Broadway stardom). But the play did not achieve popular or critical success. Perhaps the stage was not the most congenial vehicle for this particular piece, which seemed to call for the close-up of the camera upon the

emotions of the characters. Nevertheless, Foote's exceptional gifts were recognized. Brooks Atkinson, in his 1954 New York Times review of The Traveling Lady claimed: "In a theatre that is largely populated by decadent people who don't understand anything, it is a pleasure to watch Mr. Foote's characters behave like normal human beings. . . . If the whole performance is beautiful, it must be largely because Mr. Foote has written characters with enough flesh, blood, and heart to be actable" (45:2). Indeed, the characters of The Traveling Lady are at once complex, humorous, and true to life; and their struggle for happiness is universal. Set in Harrison, Texas, during three days in spring, the action centers around Georgette Thomas, who arrives in the play's small town locale with her young daughter Margaret Rose to rent a house where they and her husband Henry will live. Henry, she reluctantly admits, is just completing a prison term for stabbing a man in her home town of Lovelady and will soon be released from the penitentiary. For the six years of his imprisonment, Georgette has worked and saved to obtain the money to help her husband get out of prison so that she and Margaret Rose, whom her husband has never seen, can join him. But as she discovers, Henry has been free for over a month and has no intention of reuniting with his family. Since his release, he has been working as a yardman for Mrs. Tillman, a temperance advocate whose hobby is rehabilitating wayward

souls. Clara and her brother Slim, a restless young widower, graciously offer to let the pair stay at their home until Slim can contact Henry; but when the young man finally appears, he tries to excuse himself and then promises to return for his wife and daughter in an hour. Of course, he does not return; instead, he gets drunk, robs his employer, and attempts to skip town without being seen. However, his scheme is thwarted by his decision to stop by the grave of his aunt Kate Dawson, a mean-spirited woman who had raised him as a child in an atmosphere of hostility and abuse. Haunted by his memories of the old woman, the drunken Henry savagely mutilates her grave and curses her remains. He is soon captured and faced with returning to prison; but before he is carried away, he is granted a farewell meeting with his wife and daughter. Even this works out badly for him; knowing he is weak and will ruin Georgette's life, he begs her to forgive and forget him and then makes a futile break for freedom. As he is led away in handcuffs, Georgette finally faces the reality that she can never look to her husband for affection and support. Instead, reminiscent of Helen Crews in The Midnight Caller, she discovers love in the arms of another man, Slim Murray, who has also faced the harsh realities of a failed marriage. After declaring their love for each other, the couple leave Harrison for the Texas Valley, where jobs are plentiful and a happier life is possible.

In The Traveling Lady, Horton Foote depicts the whirlpool of emotions created within two ordinary human beings when they suddenly realize that their lives are desperately unsatisfactory. He does not offer answers for his characters any more than one finds answers in life, but he effectively depicts the suffering of ordinary people. Henry emerges as a tragic figure; orphaned as a young boy, he never experienced the love and warmth of a real family. Subjected to abuse and brutality in his youth at the hands of a cruel and misguided old woman, as an adult, he repeats the same violent patterns he learned as a child. Furthermore, Georgette, who came from a broken home and was abandoned by her husband, and Slim, whose wife deserted him and subsequently died, leaving him emotionally wounded and unsettled, all depict Foote's belief that there are no simple explanations for hardships in life or the deterioration of love. Yet, the affectionate relationship of Georgette and Slim and their desire to have a stable family life can be seen as being redemptive.

Stark Young, critic for the New Republic speaks about this relationship in his introduction to the published version of the play. He praises Foote's use of realistic dialogue and believable character. Young points to a significant dramatic moment when Henry goes to the grave of his abusive guardian, tears up the flowers, and scatters them in all directions: ". . . it might be as dark and

hideous as anything in Strindberg. . . . Just how a dramatist, and not only in this instance, comes on an image, such a motif, perhaps he himself does not know. It might remind us of what Coleridge, in one of those winged moments of his, said of science: 'All science begins in wonder and ends in wonder, and the interspace is filled with admiration'" (6-7).

In 1955, Foote returned to television even though the market for live drama was rapidly diminishing. In his book American Drama Since World War II, Gerald Weales explains that by this time "the number of television programs that accepted original material had dwindled, first in the face of quiz shows and then in competition with the filmed series--Westerns, private-eye melodramas, situation comedies. The few remaining programs seldom offered anything but adaptations" (58). Yet in spite of the approaching demise of the Golden Age of television drama, Foote wrote six more original plays between 1955 and 1964 that were eventually produced. In 1955, the U.S. Steel Hour aired The Roads to Home, a tragic story of a young woman driven insane by the bitter memories of her father's murder and her failing marriage. The play proved a success; and in 1982, Foote expanded the original teleplay to form a trilogy of one-acts that was produced on stage by the Manhattan Punch Line Theatre in New York. Foote also wrote The Road to the Graveyard, one of his darkest portraits of a Southern

family caught between their inherited dreams of wealth and posterity and the bitter reality of their poverty and decay. Unfortunately, the play was not performed until 1985 by the New York Ensemble Studio Theatre. Since that time, it has been recognized by critics as one of Foote's most impressive works (See Chapter 5). In 1956, ABC's Omnibus Playhouse premiered Drugstore Sunday Noon, starring Helen Hayes; and during that same year, Fred Coe and CBS produced both A Member of the Family, featuring Hume Cronyn, and Flight with Kim Stanley. Flight, which aired on the Pontiac Playhouse in February 1956, is the most personal of Foote's dramas and in many ways summarizes his writings for stage and television. Reminiscent of such works as Only the Heart, The Tears of My Sister, The Midnight Caller, and Courtship, Flight dramatizes the real-life attempt of the playwright's mother to marry a man of whom her parents disapproved. As Foote explained to Gerald Wood and Terry Barr, "Flight and Courtship are about the same story, only done differently. And actually it is my mother's story. . . ." (qtd. in Barr and Wood 228). In Flight, Foote speculates on what might have occurred if his mother had eloped with someone other than his father; and not surprisingly, the outcome is rather bleak. The central character, Martha Anderson, is abandoned by her husband and forced to choose between leaving home to seek a new life for herself and remaining with her proud and domineering family who cannot fully understand her plight.

The crisis of this story is precipitated by parents who want to control their children and, as in so many of Foote's plays, breaking from such control is presented as a courageous necessity. Foote explains in his preface to the play:

> I chose the particular year of 1915 because it seemed that it was a time when many of the fixed and settled values in American life were changing or being re-examined and when the whole concept of family life and family responsibility was being altered. Many of my plays deal with the rootlessness of American life. My characters are often searching for a town or a home to belong to, or a parent, or a child--all parts of the family. A crisis occurs in [Martha's] life and [her parents] are prepared to shelter and protect her, to help in whatever way they can to repair the wrong or damage that has been done to her. She refuses them and chooses to go away to a city alone. Hers is an exodus, a flight that was unusual for a girl of her background and environment then. Today, for good or bad, it is constant. (Television Plays for Writers 148-9)

In April of 1957, Fred Coe produced a shortened version of The Traveling Lady on the newly created series Playhouse 90. The production featured the direction of Robert Mulligan, who would later direct the filmed version of Baby, The Rain Must Fall, and the acting of Kim Stanley, who won the Sylvania Award for her performance in the play. Apart from the faithful transposition of his own play, Foote also contributed three adaptations of works by other authors to Playhouse 90. Two of these were adaptations of stories by William Faulkner, The Old Man (September 1958), Tomorrow (March 1960), and The Shape of the River (May 1960), a play about Mark Twain in old age. The adaptation of another

writer's work for television clearly demanded an exercise of craftsmanship rather than the creative process of shaping themes and images from the artist's own imagination. Foote revealed an ability to enter into the spirit of another's creation, respecting their artistic intention, and at the same time to infuse their works with the hallmark of his own vision. The Old Man received an enthusiastic reaction from both audiences and critics and was awarded the prestigious Emmy Award. The teleplay remains faithful to Faulkner's short story, concentrating on the lives of two convicts and a young pregnant woman during a devastating Mississippi flood. Yet, it enriches the original by focusing on the bond of love and respect that develops between the Tall Convict and the Young Woman. In his essay "On First Dramatizing Faulkner," Foote notes the difficulty he had in dramatizing the chaotic and disparate elements of Faulkner's river journey. His main problem was selecting the scenes from the story to include in his adaptation. The story itself contained for too many metaphorical implications to write into a play, so Foote decided to select scenes that would develop the relationship between the Tall Convict and the Young Woman (53-54). Foote's version of Old Man focuses upon the revelation of character rather than plot or spectacle, and the central figure echo other people on the run in Foote's plays.

In Tomorrow, the playwright transformed Faulkner's austere and structurally complex story of a taciturn young cotton farmer, Jackson Fentry, into a simple, moving drama of human companionship and one man's capacity for love. Foote has explained that the teleplay was inspired by three paragraphs in Faulkner's story where the writer refers to Fentry's brief encounter with a young woman:

> As I walked along the river, the character of the woman became alive to me, even though Faulkner gives only a few paragraphs to her. He told me enough about her so that my imagination just began to work, and she became somebody I knew. I began somehow in the most obsessive, vivid kind of way to want to discover for myself, as a writer, what went on between Jackson Fentry and this 'black-complected' woman. I was very intrigued by the character of Fentry, mainly because of the humanity of the man--but I got into the story because I became fascinated by who the woman was who was in the cabin with him, and what her story was. Why was she in the cabin? Why did she marry Fentry? What was her past? And so that night I sat down and I began to dramatize what I felt was the story of Jackson Fentry and this woman Faulkner never names. I worked on that element of the story that night and finished it the next morning. And from that day until this, I have never changed it. (qtd. in Yellin and Connors 15)

Foote's dramatization of the Fentry/Sarah relationship, the most significant change between the original story and the adaptation, was a major contribution to the work's power. The scenes between the two characters reveal the pride, tenderness, and compassion of Faulkner's creations. Fentry remains a man hardened both mentally and physically by the restrictions of his life but whose love for Sarah brooks no obstacles. Sarah is a courageous but vulnerable

woman wounded by hardship and worn out by a world seldom run according to any rules of fair play. Tomorrow was such a successful adaptation that Faulkner allowed Foote to share the dramatic copyright. Twelve years later (1972), the playwright wrote a screen version of his teleplay that is considered by many to be one of the best recreations of a Faulkner work (see Chapter 4).

As the Golden Age of live television drama faded, Foote wrote two more original teleplays for the Dupont Show of the Week, produced by David Susskind on NBC. The first, Roots in a Parched Ground (retitled The Night of the Storm by the producers), dramatizes the tragic events surrounding the death of the playwright's grandfather and the subsequent abandonment of his father. The teleplay aired on March 21, 1961, and starred Julie Harris, Jo Van Fleet, Mildred Dunnock, E.G. Marshall, and Marc Connolly. The action begins after Julia Robedaux has moved back to her family's house with her children, Horace Jr. and Beth Ruth; she has enlisted the help of her sister Callie in turning the old home place into a boarding house operation. Her husband Horace Sr., ravaged by alcoholism, awaits the day of his death in his mother's home with hope that he will recover from his illness, mend his family, and guide his son in the study of law. This fragile strand of hope is broken when Horace Sr. dies and Julia discovers that the boarding house is a losing proposition. Her only course of action is to

move the family to Houston in search of more lucrative employment, but Horace Jr. refuses to go and runs away during a violent storm. His mother believes he has drowned in a nearby river and gives him up for lost. Weeks later, Horace Jr. reappears and finds that his family has moved to Houston without him. When Julia learns that her son is still alive, she returns to Harrison and, in a poignant scene, tells the boy she has remarried. Unfortunately, she cannot allow her son to go back with her, at least for the present, because her new husband has refused to care for the boy. Horace is left alone with no more than his father's law books to comfort him. He also has the gentle guidance and concern of his father's best friend, Jim Howard, who offers to teach him law. As the play ends, Horace and Mr. Howard begin to study and to help each other cope with their pain. Considering the extremely personal nature of the work, it is not surprising that Roots in a Parched Ground would later become the initial play in Foote's cycle The Orphans' Home.

The second teleplay that Foote wrote for the Dupont Show of the Week was The Gambling Heart, performed on February 23, 1964. The play, which starred Ruth White, Sarah Marshall, John Cullum, Tom Bosley, Estelle Parsons, and Sudie Bond, deals with an aging mother's "gambling heart," her two married daughters, and their husbands, one of whom is a compulsive gambler and turns ten thousand

dollars into millions while the other husband is not so lucky. The Gambling Heart is important not only because it contains characters and themes drawn from the playwright's own experiences but, also, because it was the last original Foote play shown on television for nearly twenty years.

Since 1964, the playwright has contributed a number of commissioned scripts to television, such as Keeping On (1983), a story about life in a depressed mill town, and he has also written several adaptations of works by other authors, including Flannery O'Connor's The Displaced Person and William Faulkner's Barn Burning. But original plays by him have been rare. Foote's Story of a Marriage, a televised version of three plays from the Orphans' Home cycle (produced by the American Playhouse in 1987) marked his brief return.

Foote explained the reason for his withdrawal from television in a 1984 interview with Hollywood critic Gary Ballard:

> For Playhouse 90 I adapted Faulkner's The Old Man and Tomorrow. To my regret, The Old Man helped bring about the death knell of live drama. John Frankenheimer built a large tank for the flood scenes which almost cracked the studio floor when it was filled with water. They couldn't do it live so they did it on tape. From then one, more and more taped shows were used. They were all right, I suppose, but something went out of me here. But who knows? If we went back to live drama, we might not like it so much. Most big stars wouldn't do it anyway. Lillian Gish was the exception. She didn't have to worry about money and she always enjoyed new challenges. The reason for live television's success was that the economics were good and we had a great pool of

> young, undiscovered talent to cast from. When the cost started to mount, the adventure began to leave. (qtd. in Ballard 1, 14)

Thus, the Golden Age of Television ended precisely because television is a business. Live drama became expensive to produce, while less expensive alternatives proved more successful in attracting audiences. Serious live drama could not compete with the popular commercial fare that began to take over the market; the playwrights, who had once depended on television as a place to produce their works, were forced to find other alternatives.

Clearly, the withdrawal of such a talented writer as Horton Foote has been a great loss to television, for even his weakest plays offer examples of the medium's potential as a vehicle for intimate, domestic drama. Foote, however, went on to become one of that rare breed of contemporary playwrights who writes successfully for film as well as television and theatre. But his own creative power of skillfully crafting dialogue and strong characters was perhaps best demonstrated and tested in the unique arena of live television. The 1950s had been a time of great challenges and ferment for Foote, and during that short period, in which television offered exciting original drama, he was rightfully considered the medium's finest playwright. When asked about that time in his career, Foote responds with nostalgia: "I suppose you can't have the Depression or Roosevelt years again, and you can't have the old Philco

Playhouse again. It was such a happy time that you just have to shut it out of your heart" (Foote interview, 18 Nov. 1988).

Chapter 4
FOOTE AND FILM

> Now to get to that other side of my life, which is the film side, again I was very fortunate in the sense that because of Philco-Goodyear my identity as a writer was fairly established, so that consequently, Hollywood, being the copycat that it often is, any time there was a third-rate, or fourth-rate, or a fifth-rate Southern novel, they'd call me up and everyone thought I was a Southern specialist. (qtd. in Edgerton 5)

Few American dramatists have had a career as varied as Horton Foote. Certainly no other writer has pursued his craft more productively or more persistently across so many different media. During the 1940s and 50s, more than twenty of his dramas appeared on Broadway stages or on television shows. In 1954, he was featured in a Life magazine article, "Bright Galaxy of Playwrights," which heralded him, along with Paddy Chayefsky, Tad Mosel, Richard Nash, and Robert Alan Arthur, as America's best hope for raising television drama to a significant cultural level. In 1956, he reached a high point in his career with the publication of the novel, The Chase, and eight television dramas under the title Harrison, Texas. However, by the time Foote's teleplays appeared in print, opportunities to produce original scripts had diminished, and the anthology series was in danger of completely disappearing from the screen. Foote wrote a few more teleplays during the early sixties; but since television offered little incentive for original work, he accepted a series of commissioned jobs adapting

other writers' material for the screen. The most notable of them were William Faulkner's Old Man (1958) and Tomorrow (1960) for CBS's Playhouse 90. Foote had never enjoyed the process of adaptation because he felt he had important ideas of his own to express, and he disliked tampering with recognized classics to fit the demands of another medium. But the work kept him sufficiently solvent to write the kind of personal plays he wanted, and the popular and critical acclaim that his adaptations received eventually opened the door to a new phase in his career as a Hollywood screenwriter.

In 1961, motion picture director Robert Mulligan and producer Alan Pakula purchased the movie rights to Harper Lee's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel To Kill A Mockingbird and began making plans to transform the work into a feature film with the support of Universal Studios. From the beginning, Mulligan and Pakula were determined to make an authentically Southern film that would capture the spirit and flavor of Lee's story. To fulfill their dream, they needed a scenarist who not only understood the South but who could transpose the sprawling prose of the novel into an actable screenplay. Mulligan, who had directed Foote's version of Tomorrow for CBS, had a reputation for recognizing talented writers and suggested to Alan Pakula that he approach Horton Foote about writing the script. He was certain that Foote would immediately approve of the project, but securing the

writer's consent was not as easy as Mulligan and Pakula had hoped. At the time, Foote was weary of adaptation and concerned about his future as a dramatist: "I had previously adapted the two Faulkner stories (Old Man and Tomorrow), and here I was getting into the nature of adapting, which is very upsetting to me because I was losing my identity, you know" (qtd. in Barr and Wood 226). Furthermore, he knew very little about writing for the screen. His only contact with Hollywood had been as a staff writer for Warner Brothers from 1954 to 1955, and this experience had not been a particularly pleasant one:

> I knew a little bit about the old Hollywood, but when I arrived, it was just ending. I was employed by Warners and I was the only writer of what they called theatrical films on the lot. My secretary, that day, took me into all these empty offices and said Isherwood wrote here. Faulkner wrote here, this one here. They were all gone and here I was all by myself. I had to punch a time-clock when I came in, and I had to stay there for eight hours, and everything I wrote belonged to Warner Brothers. I had to punch a time-clock to go out, and the myth was that Jack Warner peeked in every now and then in your window to see if you were working. I never caught him doing that, but I believed it though. (qtd. in Edgerton 5-6)

Most of Foote's assignments were to adapt the work of Southern writers, such as Erskine Caldwell, but his only credit during this period resulted from a project for United Artists, entitled Storm Fear (1955), which was produced, directed, and starred in by Cornell Wilde. Foote created a polished screenplay from Clinton Seeley's novel, but the film received such unfavorable reviews for both its acting

and direction that he returned to Texas after its release to resume writing his own plays. Foote's brief apprenticeship in Hollywood had thoroughly convinced him that a dramatist who adapts another writer's fiction for the screen rarely receives any satisfaction for his labor. He can never entirely please the original author, nor can he satisfy the audience who has definite ideas and illusions about plot, characterization, background, and motivation. Worse yet, a writer must accept the fact that a motion picture is by its very nature a collaborative effort, and too often the words, the scenes, and even the story of a screenplay can be brutally altered by the director and his collaborative team.

Clearly, if the decision to adapt To Kill A Mockingbird had been left solely to Foote, he likely never would have consented; but his wife, Lillian, read the novel and was so moved by the story that she convinced her husband to accept the project:

> She said, 'I know you're going to fuss and holler. But I really think you should at least read this and think about it.' And, uh, I read it, and I thought it was, you know, moving to me. I still didn't want to do it; she talked me into it. And so I said to Alan that I would be interested. I said it would be a back-breaking job because it sprawls all over. And he said, 'Well, the thing is, now, that we offered it to Harper Lee and she doesn't want to do it. And you are her first choice and our first choice. But I think you-all should meet to see if you get along.' And I said that was fine. So he brought her out, and I must say, she sold me. I mean I just loved her; she is a wonderful woman. And I thought, 'Well, I'll enjoy this, if no more than getting to know her. (qtd. in Barr and Wood 227)

In 1962, his screenplay of To Kill A Mockingbird was rewarded with both the Writers Guild Award for Best-Written American Drama and the Academy Award for Best Screenplay. Today, more than thirty years later, Foote's adaptation is considered one of his finest literary achievements, and the movie is recognized as a classic of American cinema.

To Kill A Mockingbird has endured because Foote succeeded in converting Harper Lee's prose into a film that appealed to audiences, both visually and dramatically. Robert Mulligan's sensitive direction, as well as a host of exceptional performances (including Gregory Peck's Oscar-winning portrayal of Atticus Finch, Mary Badham's highly acclaimed performance as Scout, and Robert Duvall's stirring portrait of Boo Radley), contributed to the success of the picture. But it was Horton Foote's understanding of the central themes of Harper Lee's novel and his ability to transform effectively the disparate elements of her story into a coherent and literate script that elevated the film to an exceptional level of achievement.

From the beginning, Foote felt at home in Harper Lee's Southern world. The town of the novel, Maycomb, Alabama, was not unlike the town he had been born and reared in, the characters resembled those of his own imaginative fiction, and the setting of the novel, the Great Depression of the 1930s, was a period that he had lived through and had written about for more than twenty years. Foote's

understanding of this setting is evidenced in the first minute of the film; black-and-white traveling shots reveal a small Southern community on a typical summer afternoon in 1932, and the soft Southern voice of an adult Scout Finch explains what it was like to grow up in this "tired old" Alabama town. The challenge in scripting To Kill A Mockingbird was not in recreating the atmosphere of the original work (for Foote had turned to the same setting in many of his plays) but in compressing the events of the novel, which encompassed two years, into a movie script of a two-hour length, and in merging the two plots of the story into a continuous narrative without losing the thematic intent of the author.

Harper Lee's novel offers a telling indictment of racial injustice as revealed through the story of Tom Robinson, a poor Black laborer falsely accused and condemned for raping a white girl, and a charming tale of the emergence of two youngsters, Scout and Jem Finch, from innocent childhood to maturity, responsibility, and social awareness. Both stories had to be told in a manner that would emphasize the contrast between the two plots and also express the larger theme of moral courage as embodied in the major protagonist, Atticus Finch. To meld these elements together, Foote relied heavily upon a review by R.P. Blackmur, called "Scout in the Wilderness," which compares To Kill A Mockingbird to Huckleberry Finn, and the character

of Scout to Huck. This review, he admits, "strengthened my own feelings that we should discover the evil and hypocrisy in this small Southern pastoral town along with and through the eyes of the children. I was also helped by Alan Pakula's suggestion that we restructure the events of the novel which ran over several years to fit into a single year. The two approaches, one subjective and one objective, helped me to find both a style and structure for the screenplay" (Foreword, Three Screenplays xii).

Foote's script, a model of compression, succeeds in one hundred and twenty-nine minutes of screen time, to fuse together the different components of Harper Lee's story. Most of the action of the movie takes place over two summers; and, like the novel, it moves along as leisurely as a Southern afternoon while interweaving the fantasy world of the children with the harsher realities of adult life. The youngsters' activities revolve around Boo Radley, the grown-up son of the family that lives in the ramshackle house across the street. Boo, known to be crazy and dangerous, has not been seen since his father supposedly locked him away years ago for stabbing him with a pair of scissors. Rumors of his fearsome habits and appearance provide ample material upon which the imaginations of Scout, Jem, and their young friend, Dill, can take flight. They make timorous trips to the Radley house, run in terror from Boo's

stalking shadow, and find soap carvings in their likenesses hidden by Boo in the hollow of a tree.

Gently presiding over the children is their father Atticus, a lawyer of quiet but firm bearing. Atticus, a man of deep moral conviction, believes in the honor and dignity of all living creatures and tries to teach his motherless children the value of human decency. Through Atticus a more ambiguous, contradictory reality is introduced into the lives of Scout and Jem. Atticus cannot spare his children from the larger and more frightening world that lies beyond the sphere of their pleasant neighborhood; and when he is asked to defend Tom Robinson (who is accused of raping the lonely and abused Mayella Ewell), he exposes himself and his children to the prejudice and hostility of the community. At school, Scout and Jem are taunted by other students who call their father slanderous names; near the town dump, they are brought face to face with the ugly world in which the Ewell's live; and at the courthouse, they watch as their father patiently withstands threats of violence. In one of the most powerful scenes of the film, they follow Atticus as he goes to stand guard outside the jail to which Tom has been moved during the trial. Suddenly a lynch mob gathers; and Scout, innocent of the danger, disarms the crowd with her uninhibited chatter with one of the potential lynchers whose son she knows at school. As the children witness this and other events, they learn about their father's character,

about the tyranny of social codes, about the differences between one human being and another, and about the value of courage and integrity.

The Boo Radley plot develops along with the plot of the trial. Jem, Scout, and Dill sneak up to the Radley house one night hoping to get a glimpse of Boo. When a large shadow appears, they run in terror; and Jem gets his overalls tangled in a fence as he flees. When he goes back to retrieve them, he discovers that they have been gathered up and neatly folded for him. The mystery is further compounded when the children begin to find little gifts--two soap dolls, a broken watch and chain, and a knife--left in the knothole of an oak tree on the Radley property. As a result of these developments, Scout and Jem's understanding of the world slowly alters. But it is at the trial that the children are most affected. There they witness the injustice of a white jury who, despite Atticus' skillful demonstration of Tom's innocence, convict the man of rape. As Atticus leaves the courtroom in defeat, the black people in the upper gallery, along with Scout and Jem, stand in his honor. Minutes later, we discover that Tom was shot to death as he supposedly tried to escape from custody.

Finally, the two plots of the film come together as Bob Ewell, Mayella's abusive and bigoted father, takes revenge upon Atticus by attacking Scout and Jem while they are walking home through the woods at night. Jem is knocked

unconscious, and Scout manages to struggle out of the unusual costume that has obscured her vision just in time to see Bob Ewell lying dead next to her and a shadowy figure running from the scene with the injured Jem. At home, Scout is embraced by her father and then led to her room where Jem lies in bed. As she relates her story to the sheriff, Atticus points to a mysterious man standing behind the door and acknowledges him as the one who carried Jem home. When the girl looks up, she suddenly finds herself face to face with the dreaded Boo Radley, who has been watching lovingly over the children all along. As the two gaze at each other in a moment of innocent respect, Scout realizes that the phantom of her childhood fears has saved her from the menace of the real world. Then Atticus graciously introduces his daughter to Mr. Arthur Radley, humbly bestowing on the recluse the dignity of his real name; Scout takes the hand of her new friend to walk him home. Standing on the Radley porch, Scout pauses to view the world from Boo's perspective and recalls that her father had once told her: "you never really know a man until you stand in his shoes and walk around in them" (Lee, To Kill A Mockingbird 282).

Foote's screenplay of the novel To Kill A Mockingbird remains faithful to Harper Lee's personal vision. Foote often interpolated into the script dialogue taken directly from the novel, as in the scene where Atticus remembers the time his father gave him a gun and warned him not to shoot

mockingbirds: "I remember when my daddy gave me that gun. He told me that I should never point it at anything in the house. And that he'd rather I'd just shoot tin cans in the backyard, but he said that sooner or later he supposed the temptation to go after birds would be too much, and that I could shoot all the blue jays I wanted, if I could hit them, but to remember it is a sin to kill a mockingbird." When Jem questions his father, Atticus responds: "Well, I reckon because mockingbirds don't do anything but make music for us to enjoy. They don't eat people's gardens, don't nest in the corncribs, they don't do one thing but just sing their hearts out for us" (Three Screenplays 33).

If fidelity was the guiding principle of Foote's work on To Kill A Mockingbird, the film also contains many passages of dialogue which are highly characteristic of the playwright's own fiction. Foote admits that childhood memories of intentional eavesdropping played an important part in the adaptation. Examples are in one scene where the children, listening through the bedroom window, overhear a crucial conversation between their father and the sheriff, and in another where the camera pauses on Atticus listening from the front porch to his children talking in bed about the mother they barely remember. The screenplay also mirrors some of Foote's thematic concerns and preoccupations. The focus on family life in a small Southern town, the central ideas of courage and dignity in

the face of human injustice, and the emphasis on motherless children coming to terms with life's ambiguities are themes often explored in his own works. Above all, To Kill A Mockingbird exemplifies the principles of eloquent silence and understatement that are so much a part of Foote's writing style. Harper Lee best explained Foote's achievement as a screenwriter when she stated:

> Horton Foote's screenplay is a work of such quiet and unobtrusive excellence that many people have commented on the fact that the film's dialogue was lifted chapter and verse from the novel. This is simply not so. Scenes humorous, scenes tender, scenes terrifying, each with a definite purpose and value, blended so delicately with the original, created the illusion that these were Harper Lee's words. If the integrity of a film adaptation is measured by the degree to which the novelist's intent is preserved, Mr. Foote's screenplay should be studied as a classic." ("A Word" v)

When To Kill A Mockingbird was released in 1962, it drew exceptional critical and popular praise. Furthermore, during this era of the Civil Rights Movement, the movie was given several awards for its honest and compassionate presentation of race relations in the South. Many saw To Kill A Mockingbird as a timely, moral exposition of the plight of blacks in America; but it is now evident that the film's qualities are more enduring than was first realized. To Kill A Mockingbird is not only a moving indictment of racial injustice but a timeless story of childhood dreams and fears.

The success of To Kill A Mockingbird thrust Foote into the Hollywood spotlight, stimulated interest in his own works as potential movies, and established his reputation as a screenwriter for the remainder of the decade. During the next five years, he worked on all or part of four more motion pictures, two of which were adaptations of his own plays. In the spring of 1963, he reworked The Traveling Lady for the screen; in the following October, Alan Pakula and Robert Mulligan teamed up once again to film the play as Baby, The Rain Must Fall, a title taken from a popular song by the film's music composer, Elmer Bernstein. Produced by Columbia Pictures and shot on location in Wharton and Columbia, Texas, Baby, The Rain Must Fall did not meet with the same kind of enthusiastic reaction as To Kill A Mockingbird. But the film nevertheless revealed that Foote's play could be as emotionally effective on the big screen as it had been earlier on television and on the stage. Foote took advantage of the freedom of movement that the camera offered his story; and throughout the film, a heightened sense of verisimilitude, reinforced by the location shots, provides a powerful counterpart to the playwright's realistic dialogue and realization of character. Director Robert Mulligan suggests that the authenticity of the setting was an important factor in enhancing the credibility of the movie: "It has the violence that rests under Foote's characters--and the terror; bold

Gothic strokes. These are people who cannot be destroyed. They will always move toward life. Foote calls the movie script a rediscovery of characters. We have deepened the characters, and that is what opens up the movie. It is not just that we did a lot of filming outdoors in Texas. The purpose of that was to have infinite horizons. It makes the people look really finite, lost and lonely" (qtd. in Schumach 22).

Foote began with a play that focused largely on Georgette Thomas' courageous attempt to save her marriage to a drunken, mean-spirited man; but in the screenplay, he enlarged the story by filling in details of character and action and by shifting the focus of the work. While we learn more about Georgette's family background, about her relationship to her widowed father, and about her estrangement from her husband, the most significant change in the screen adaptation is the fuller picture of Henry Thomas. Henry's efforts to be a good husband and father, his quest to establish a career as a country-western singer, and his attempts to overcome his violent temperament are at the heart of the screenplay.

Baby, The Rain Must Fall opens as Georgette and her young daughter, Margaret Rose, wearily arrive in Columbus, Texas, where they look forward to a surprise reunion with Henry, who Georgette believes will soon be released from prison after serving time for stabbing a man in a drunken

brawl. From Slim, the quiet-spoken deputy sheriff, Georgette learns that her husband has been in town for some time, having been paroled to Miss Kate Dawson, the dictatorial spinster who had raised the orphaned Henry. As the screenplay makes clear, Miss Kate and Henry have never gotten along; in her early attempts to control the boy, she systematically beat him to quell his outbursts of defiance until the neighbors finally complained and stepped in to take a firm hand. Now Miss Kate, ailing but still indomitable in spirit, refuses to talk to Henry in person; but she sends him iron-worded messages demanding that he remain steadily employed. The film explores the relationship of Miss Kate and Henry more fully than does the play, and this closer look allows the audience to feel more sympathy for the young man. Henry's dreams and ambitions are also significantly altered in the film. While the play suggests that he has aspirations of forming a musical band, the screenplay clarifies the depth of Henry's love for music. Becoming a country-western star has always been his dream, and his only true happiness comes from strumming his guitar and singing at the local roadhouses. But Miss Kate has ruthlessly fought his desire to become a musician; and during the film, she warns Henry that she will turn him over to the sheriff as a parole violator unless he renounces his ambitions and begins to take classes at night school. Throughout the film, Henry dwells in constant fear that the

old woman will carry out her threat and have him sent back to prison.

Georgette is the only one who supports Henry's dreams. Determined to build a family life and to find happiness for herself and Margaret Rose, she works as a waitress to help pay for their keep so that her husband can save his money for a trip to Nashville or California where he can sell his songs and become famous. For a brief time, Henry responds to Georgette's love and sacrifice and genuinely tries to be a dutiful husband and father, but the emotional burdens in his life ultimately explode in a violent and savage fight with a loudmouthed roadhouse patron. Word spreads quickly about Henry's latest trouble, and he is left terrified that Miss Kate will take action. He utters vague promises that he will give up his music, but he is unable to carry through with the old woman's demands. One evening, after building up the courage to confront her, he becomes so terrified that he cannot ascend the stairs to her bedroom. Her very presence, even behind a closed door, paralyzes him; and all that he is able to do as he runs out of the house is to scream to her that he will not quit his musical band. Miss Kate's menacing influence over Henry becomes even clearer when she summons him to her house on the night of her death. As the garrulous old woman sleeps, Henry quietly sits remembering his childhood and the time, after being abandoned by his parents, he was discovered alone and crying

by Judge Ewing and placed in the care of Miss Kate. Suddenly, Miss Kate awakens; and after seeing the young man patiently by her side, she utters a final bitter bequest: "You're no good, Henry, never have been. You're not worth killin." Miss Kate dies with only a curse for her adopted son; as the scene slowly dissolves, the audience is left with an indelible image of the years of loneliness and pain that the young man suffered as a child. The following day at the funeral, Judge Ewing informs Henry that Miss Kate has left him only a few mementos, that her house is to be sold to satisfy debts, and that she has bequeathed her silver to Miss Tillman, her best friend. Henry is seemingly unconcerned with material possessions; for he believes that with the old woman out of the way, he can now continue to pursue his music career and not go to school as he had promised. However, even in death, Kate Dawson continues to torment him as Judge Ewing explains that her last wish was that the sheriff force him to study for a profession. Angered by the news, Henry breaks into Miss Kate's house to steal whatever valuables the old woman has left behind. He finds nothing except a few pieces of silverware and a lone belt strapped to a nail on the pantry door, the symbol of his abused childhood. As his emotions reach a fury, he runs out of the house into the cemetery where he begins savagely to mutilate Miss Kate's grave. Georgette watches the awful sight as Slim tries to restrain her maddened husband; but

their actions come too late for Henry, who is destined to return to prison for breaking his parole. In the film, Henry tries to escape from the sheriff after a last meeting with Margaret Rose, as he does in the play; but his actions are not so much an attempt to flee from the burdens of family life as they are an effort to escape from the memory of Kate Dawson and the hostility of the small Texas town that would not give him a chance to go straight.

At this point in the film, the focus of the action returns to Georgette, whose attempts to save her marriage and protect her husband from the destructive influence of Miss Kate have failed. She has experienced a terrifying emotional nightmare that has left her in a state of inner turmoil; but Georgette manages to survive her heartache and continue her search for personal fulfillment. With the aid of Slim, she and Margaret Rose light out for the Texas valley where there are nice towns, good people, and plenty of opportunities for employment. Clearly, there is hope that Georgette and Slim will one day build a stable and happy life together; but the resolution of the screenplay is less optimistic than the original play. As Slim drives past the house where Georgette, Henry, and Margaret Rose briefly shared their hopes and aspirations, the camera zooms in on the tiny chinaberry tree that was planted by Henry and Margaret Rose--a sign of promise for a happy life--as though to emphasize the pain, agony, and broken dreams that this

family has had to endure. Finally, as the camera pauses at a fork in the road to give Georgette one final glimpse of Henry before he is escorted back to prison, we are suddenly reminded of the mysterious nature of human suffering and of the remarkable courage with which this woman carries on with her life.

Baby, The Rain Must Fall has never received the praise it deserves. Since the time of its release in January 1965, critics have argued that Foote weakened his original story by moving the focus of the story from Georgette to her husband Henry. But clearly, the most powerful aspect of the screenplay is the deepening of the relationship between these two figures and the addition of the Kate Dawson character. The film is more successful than the play in showing the anguish of this family, the reasons for Henry's downfall, and the compromises that Georgette must make in order to survive her loss. Furthermore, the freedom of the camera allowed for the addition of situations and locales that place Henry and Georgette in a larger context, and what we see of their daily lives makes their need for love and affection appear all the stronger. Lee Remick's performance as Georgette offers us a record of a great, terribly underrated actress who portrayed the very essence of Foote's tender and courageous Texas woman. Steve McQueen's portrait of Henry, the unconnected drifter whose dreams of stardom do not mesh with the responsibility of caring for his neglected

family, is arguably the best performance of his career. The movie still appears on television and on college campuses, despite the fact that it has never received the recognition of To Kill A Mockingbird or Tender Mercies. It is the only Foote movie to spawn a documentary film, A Shooting in Town, which shows the social and economic effects that the movie had upon Wharton, Texas. Indeed, Baby, The Rain Must Fall remains an unsung treasure and one of Foote's most impressive dramatizations.

Foote's next screen adaptation of his own work illustrates how quickly expectations about a motion picture can be dashed by conceptual confusions and creative problems. In 1965, Foote was asked by the well-known Hollywood producer Sam Speigel to adapt his novel and play The Chase for the screen. At first, the playwright was eager to do so; but as the two began to share their interpretations of the film, Foote quickly recognized the enormous artistic differences between them and tried to back out of the deal. However, by that time, Speigel owned the movie rights to The Chase, and Foote could do nothing to keep his work from reaching the screen as the producer had envisioned. Speigel sank a fortune into the movie, selected a talented cast that included Marlon Brando, Jane Fonda, E.G. Marshall, Robert Redford, and Angie Dickinson, hired a well-known director Arthur Penn, and entrusted the job of adaptation to Lillian Hellman, one of America's foremost

playwrights. But the immense talents of these artists could not keep The Chase from becoming a cinematic failure. An ambitious producer bent on controlling all aspects of filmmaking, a director determined to elevate the film to an art form by expressing his own point of view within the work, and a screenwriter attempting to prove her artistic marketability after a fifteen year political exile from Hollywood made a contradictory collaborative team. Their artistic differences resulted in a movie that was "overproduced by Sam Speigel, overplotted by Lillian Hellman, and overdirected by Arthur Penn" (Crowther 24:1).

Unquestionably, the most disappointing aspect of The Chase was the screenplay. Lillian Hellman retained the skeletal outline of Foote's drama, which tells of Sheriff Edwin Hawes courageous but futile attempt to return Bubber Reeves to prison (see Chapter 2). But her work more closely reflected Sam Speigel's interpretation of the piece than the playwright's. In a 1966 interview with Holiday magazine, Speigel explained that he had originally envisioned The Chase as a portrait of American society, squeezed into the microcosm of a small Texas town that smoldered with corruption and discontent; he intended a statement on the senseless violence that led to the assassination of President John Kennedy and the murder of Lee Harvey Oswald in 1963.

> This little Texas town that we call Tarl, you must remember that not long ago towns like this were,

> literally, frontier communities. Then, very quickly, they became vastly different, changed by sudden wealth, by the advances of technology. Where there was hardship, there is now ease, and in this climate, among people who have found no moral substitute for the hardships of the old frontier, there is a terrible indifference--they have lost their sense of responsibility toward each other. Our story then is about an entire town, about how it has been corrupted at every level by this affluence and ease. The action takes place during one Saturday afternoon and night. The people have been drifting, bored; they seek only diversion. Now each one, caught up in the excitement created by the return of the escaped convict, reveals himself. Six years ago I began to develop a Chase script, but I had to put it aside for Lawrence of Arabia. The incident in Dallas when Adlai Stevenson was jeered and spat upon, brought The Chase strongly back into my mind. Here, on a larger scale, was the sort of community I had seen as a background. What had happened to these people? How could they do a thing like this? And soon afterward came the assassination of President Kennedy. Since then I have devoted myself to the making of this picture. It will cost, I believe, about seven million dollars before we are through. (qtd. in Brown 87-88)

Hellman's screenplay made obvious everything that Foote had left ambiguous in his play and novel. She turned drama into melodrama, and tried to touch upon nearly every social disease troubling America during the decade of the 1960s, including greed, injustice, adultery, alcoholism, apathy, and even religious fanaticism. Also, contrary to Foote's work, Hellman's adaptation creates an extremely cynical and class-conscious world. Unlike Foote's small town of Richmond, Texas, Hellman's Tarl County resembles a feudal state with millionaire Val Rogers as lord and ruler. He owns the oil fields in which the citizens work, the housing

developments where they live, the bank in which they keep their money, and the local college where their children attend school. Rogers is shown respect by the people of Tarl, not because he is a worthy man but because he has a great deal of money and power. He wants to believe that he is loved by everyone, but his relationship with his son proves otherwise. In establishing Jake as a proper heir to the family fortune, Val has forced the young man into a stifling and destructive mold, which includes a loveless marriage to a young socialite, who neither respects her husband nor finds him physically attractive. Jake and Elizabeth appear together in public to please Val, but both must go outside their marriage to find companionship. Jake is in love with Bubber's faithless wife Anna but their relationship is far from idyllic. Their weekly meetings at a local motel, played out in a volatile combination of passionate desire and sexual frustration, merely illustrate the extent to which they are separated by money and social differences.

The protagonist of the film, Sheriff Calder (Hellman's cinematic equivalent to the heroic Edwin Hawes), is an honest man committed to justice. But in the movie, his privileged position with Val Rogers, who has adopted him as a kind of surrogate son and appointed him sheriff, leads the jealous townspeople to conclude that he is merely a patsy. Rogers believes that he owns the sheriff; but during the

course of the film, he learns otherwise when Calder refuses to bow to his power. After discovering that Jake and Anna are lovers, Rogers tries to get Calder to tell him where Bubber is hiding out so that he can prevent him from killing his son. Calder refuses to answer Roger's request. Val is subsequently reduced to using violence against Lester Johnson, a black man who knows the whereabouts of the convict. With Rogers on the offensive against Reeves, the town erupts into mass hysteria and explodes in a melange of beatings, rioting, gunshots, fires, and explosions. Calder is savagely beaten by three vigilantes, Bubber is discovered holed up in an automobile junkyard, and Jake is mortally wounded while trying to help Reeves escape. Calder rescues Bubber from the mob and returns him to town; but as they ascend the steps of the county courthouse, the young man is killed by a gunman, an obvious reference to the shooting of Lee Harvey Oswald in Dallas a few years earlier. Calder, reduced to the level of the rest of the townspeople, brutally beats the assassin. Of course, there can be no positive ending to such an uncompromising screenplay, and as the film reaches its logical conclusion, Calder and his wife Ruby pack up and move to their farm in an effort to escape the violence and corruption of the town.

The Chase was clearly intended to be a socially conscious movie, but as critic Bosley Crowther explained in 1966:

> Everything is intentionally overheated, the emotional content, the pictorial style, the directing, the acting, the fist-fighting, the burning of the junkyard at the end--everything. The only thing that is not overheated--at least I don't think it will be--is the audience's reaction. This is a picture to leave you cold. That's because it is so obvious and so outrageously clumsy an attempt to blend a weak but conceivably dramatic theme of civil rights with a whole mess of small-town misbehaviors of the sort that you get in Peyton Place. And it has an ending that was not in Mr. Foote's play but was evidently inspired by a very tragic occurrence in Texas in 1963. More bad taste. (24:1)

Despite its unfavorable reception, The Chase proved to be an interesting learning experience for Foote. When it became obvious that the screenplay had problems, he was called in as a writing consultant. By that time, however, it was too late. Few of the changes he made to the script were ever used. Nevertheless, Foote experienced first hand how tricky it is to make a good movie and how producers, directors, and actors are crippled without a coherent and actable script. More importantly, as Foote admitted to Al Reinert, he learned that "if you sell your work to a studio, they own it. That's why I never would do it again. That's the last time I did it" (qtd. in Reinert 135).

Although Foote was disenchanted with the Hollywood system he did accept a few more jobs as a commissioned screenwriter. In 1966, the well-known director Otto Preminger recruited Foote to write the screenplay for K.G. Glidden's novel Hurry Sundown, a melodrama about racial prejudice and the debilitating effects of poverty in the

South. Initially, Foote was excited about working with Preminger, whom he believed had always managed to work within the system to make respectable pictures. However, his efforts to moderate the novel's melodramatic structure and stilted language did not suit Preminger's purposes; and before shooting even began, the two began to argue about the script's style and approach. It was the peak of the civil rights movement, and Preminger envisioned Glidden's tale as a modern day allegory about American racism. Foote tried to make the best of the material, though not a single word of his was used in the shooting script; and while he is credited as co-writer with Thomas Ryan, he maintains that he had nothing to do with the film's final assembly (Edgerton 7). The experience of Hurry Sundown convinced Horton Foote that Hollywood was not for him and, except for writing an uncredited revision of the western The Stalking Moon (1968) for Warner Brothers, he steered clear of feature films until 1972, when he returned as an independent filmmaker.

Clearly, the 1960s was not a particularly happy time for Horton Foote. Foote says of his Hollywood experience: "I knew that this was not working for me. The ten million dollars and what are the distributors going to think, and can we get this star and that star. It was just driving me crazy" (qtd. in Edgerton 7). Furthermore, from the mid-sixties until the late seventies the theatre was disinterested in his plays. During those times of political

and racial unrest, realistic family dramas tended to be ignored as Broadway became the staging area for a new generation of artists and playwrights whose ideas and writings reflected the social revolution that beset contemporary America. The theatre was introduced to fresh and liberating artistic movements such as absurdism and the theatre of cruelty, and young writers like Edward Albee, Adrienne Kennedy, Leroi Jones, and Sam Shepard dominated the stage with plays that revealed a country plagued by political turmoil, racial injustice, and the war in Vietnam.

Overwhelmed by this explosive artistic rebellion and frustrated with the practices of Hollywood, Foote felt a need to retreat with his family and to reevaluate his career goals. In the late sixties, he moved his family from their home in Nyack, New York, to New Boston, New Hampshire, where he withdrew from the public eye and began working on his own material again.

> I just thought I should sort of hold still for a while. Well, first of all, I wasn't selling very much. Secondly, I was being offered work, but it was always to dramatize somebody else's ideas. I took some of those jobs just to keep myself going. You know, the theatre of the 60s and early 70s was changing--and still is--and the Broadway that I had been raised on and thought to be the ultimate was disappearing in front of my eyes. Off Broadway was just kind of finding itself and making a lot of experiments I was interested in but didn't want to partake of. And I've always had this urge or desire for many years to investigate the material I write about (qtd. in Flippo 36).

Although Foote accepted a few writing jobs, such as a musical adaptation of Margaret Mitchell's Gone With The Wind (1970), the years between 1966 and 1972 were lean times for the playwright and his family. It could easily have been the end of his career; but as Foote admitted to Samuel Freedman, he was able to survive this difficult period with the encouragement of his wife and children:

> Lillian was selling real estate and we both loved antiques and sometimes I'd say, 'Maybe I'll open an antique shop.' She'd always say, 'Stick to the writing.' She never doubted it. We'd get in the car and I'd say, 'Lillian, I can't stand the theatre, the state it's in. I can't stand Hollywood. I have no talent as a novelist. I love poetry but it's not my form. I'm stuck with plays, and what am I doing? What's going to happen? And she kept me goin'. She never lost faith, and that's a rare thing." (qtd. in Freedman 50)

With Lillian steadfastly by his side, Foote kept working. By the end of the seventies, he had written or was rewriting more than a dozen original plays, including The Road to the Graveyard, The Habitation of Dragons, and The Roads to Home (See Chapter 5). By the mid-eighties, as Foote began to re-emerge as a significant voice in the American cinema, these plays and others would gain national recognition.

Horton Foote renewed his reputation as a screenwriter in 1972 with a film version of William Faulkner's "Tomorrow." Foote had first adapted the Faulkner story into dramatic form for the ninety-minute television series Playhouse 90 in 1960. This production, which was performed

live on March 7 of that year, drew one of the largest audiences of any of the shows aired by the anthology series. Its success prompted CBS to rebroadcast the production the following year by means of a "filmed transcription of the original transmission" (Phillips 105). Critics and viewers alike took the teleplay to their hearts largely because of Horton Foote's poignant script (skillfully acted by Richard Boone and Kim Stanley, who played Jackson Fentry and Sarah Eubanks), which remained faithful to the spirit and style of Faulkner's tale. Of course, adapting a work from one medium to another requires compromise and change; in dramatizing "Tomorrow" for television, Foote made significant alterations to the short story.

Faulkner's tale begins with Chick Mallison recounting how his uncle Gavin Stevens lost his first court case, one that he thought he was sure to win. Stevens had defended Homer Bookwright, a citizen of Jefferson, who was charged with murdering Buck Thorpe, a drunken drifter who was about to run off with Bookwright's daughter, despite the fact that they were already married. Because Thorpe had drawn a pistol on Bookwright at the time of the shooting, the evidence favored the defendant's acquittal; but a lone juror, Jackson Fentry, steadfastly insisted on voting for Bookwright's conviction and eventually forced the judge to declare a mistrial. Searching for an explanation to Fentry's actions, Gavin Stevens tours the countryside asking

people who know the lowly cotton farmer why they think he hung the jury. Piecing together the information he gleans from Fentry's neighbors, the Pruitts, and from Isham Quick, Stevens finally arrives at the truth. The answer goes back twenty years to the winter that Fentry left his father's farm to work thirty miles away as a watchman at Isham Quick's unused sawmill. There, on the day before Christmas, Fentry encountered a pregnant woman who was abandoned by her husband and family. Fentry takes the woman in and cares for her until her baby is born. When she dies after giving birth, Fentry assumes responsibility for the child and returns to his father's farm to raise him. Years later, the dead woman's family shows up at Fentry's door to claim their kin; and since the law sanctions their actions, Fentry cannot prevent them from taking the boy. The child grows up to be the rebellious outlaw Buck Thorpe, who was killed by Homer Bookwright. Fentry is on the jury and refuses to acquit the man who took the life of the man who was once, for a tragically brief time, his son. When Stevens is in possession of all these facts, he is in a better position to understand why Jackson Fentry behaved as he did. Stevens winds up his assessment of Fentry's actions by quoting from Shakespeare's Macbeth ("the lowly and invincible of the earth--to endure and then endure, tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow") in order to explain to Chick the importance of Buck Thorpe to the farmer. It had been Fentry's dream that

the child he called Jackson and Longstreet would grow up to perpetuate the Fentry name and farm his land. But once the youngster was taken from him, he had no reason to look forward to the future. By refusing to vote for Bookwright's acquittal, Fentry was announcing to the world that he would not help free the man who killed the only child he would ever have. Stevens admires Fentry for continuing to endure without complaint even though he has lost the son who would have given meaning to his endurance.

In adapting "Tomorrow" for television, Horton Foote retained the basic story of Jackson Fentry but found that the character of the baby's mother deserved fuller treatment. Faulkner had only devoted two paragraphs to the woman but Foote recalls that the author "told me enough about her that my imagination just began to work, and she became somebody I knew" ("Tomorrow: The Genesis of a Screenplay" 150). Foote named the character Sarah Eubanks and set about dramatizing her relationship with Fentry from the time she arrived at the sawmill to her death a few months later. To lead up to these events, Foote also decided to begin the teleplay on the porch of the Pruitt's farmhouse with lawyer Douglas (originally called Stevens) and his nephew Chick talking about Jackson Fentry with Ed Pruitt and his mother. The teleplay then reveals Fentry's story in flashback with Ed Pruitt acting as narrator rather than Chick as in the short story. The drama ends back on

the Pruitt's front porch with Douglas' reflection on why Fentry acted as he did in court.

Robert Mulligan, who directed the production, liked Foote's script very much but suggested to the playwright that he might consider starting the teleplay with the trial rather than beginning it at the Pruitt house. Foote had initially wanted to open the play with the trial but found that the restricted playing time (seventy-two minutes) did not permit the addition of the courtroom scene (Phillips 105). It was not until 1968, when Herbert Berghof asked the writer to adapt the teleplay for an off-Broadway stage production, that Foote was finally able to include the trial. The stage version of Tomorrow, which starred Robert Duvall and Olga Bellin, did not depart much from the television play except that Thornton Douglas, rather than Ed Pruitt, served as narrator of the play so that Douglas could at times address the audience directly as if they were the jury.

Producers Paul Roebling and Gilbert Pearlman, impressed with the production on opening night (April 15, 1968), phoned Foote a few weeks later to ask if they could make a theatrical film of Tomorrow. They wanted him to supply the script and Duvall and Bellin to play the lead roles. Roebling and Pearlman, hoping to make an independent film of the highest quality, budgeted the production at a little over $400,000, not a large sum for a feature film by today's

standards but about three times the amount spent on the television program. Furthermore, the producers planned to shoot the picture on location in Tupelo, Mississippi, William Faulkner's homeland "to make it as authentic as possible," Foote explains ("The Visual Takes Over 164).

Foote became excited about the prospect of doing Tomorrow as a feature film and began work on the screenplay with enthusiasm. Since the running time of the movie was expected to be about half an hour longer than the television drama, he expanded the original story beyond the earlier scripts. He put the trial scene into the film version and decided to have Douglas, who acted as narrator for the stage production, narrate the film. This enabled the playwright to cut the episodes with the Pruitts as well as the character of Chick Mallison and restore scenes that had been dropped from the television play because of time limits. The movie opens with a brief sequence that depicts the shooting of Buck Thorpe by Homer Bookwright; then, while the credits roll by, we witness Douglas' final appeal to the jury and Fentry's refusal to acquit the defendant. Douglas declares that he intends to discover Fentry's motives for hanging the jury. Fentry's story is then told through an extended flashback, in the manner of the television version of "Tomorrow." From this point on, the screenplay, like the teleplay, focuses upon the bond of affection that develops

between Fentry and Sarah and upon Fentry's heroic endurance of the loss of his adopted son.

Nearly all the key scenes from the original script appear in the movie. One noteworthy episode occurs when Fentry gives Sarah a sack of candy as a Christmas present, and she suddenly begins to weep. Sarah, a woman of great pride and determination, explains that she never used to cry. Even when her father banished her from his house for marrying a man of whom he disapproved, she did not shed a tear but faced up to her situation as best she could. Lately, however, Sarah weeps at the slightest provocation, because as she admits, "I'm just tired and nervous. Somebody will come up to me and say 'Good morning' or 'Good evening,' and I'll cry" (140). Joseph Anthony, the film's director, notes that this scene illustrates Horton Foote's talent for using revelatory dialogue to illuminate a character's personality. "That whole scene," says Anthony, tells us more "about Sarah, her past, and who she is, and the kind of person she is, than anything she could have told about herself" (Anthony 179). As an example of Foote's ability to employ the camera effectively to convey the deeper, more crucial, feelings of a character, Anthony notes a scene where Fentry addresses Sarah's dead body, vowing to care for her child. Fentry, seated above Sarah's body, is seen only from the shoulders up; that is, we see his essence. "I don't know why we met when we did," he says, "or

why I found you when you were all wore out, and I couldn't save you no matter how bad I wanted to. I don't know what they done to you to make you turn so on them. But I don't care. I promised you I'd raise him and I will. Like he was my own." Then Fentry slowly rises, spreads the blanket over Sarah's body, moves to the baby's crib, and promises: "I will be your Momma and your Papa. You'll never want or do without while I have a breath of life in my bones" (147-148). By articulating the actions and silences of this taciturn man, Foote enhanced the mood, tone, and theme of Faulkner's prose. The wonder of the scene is that Robert Duvall shows almost no surface emotion, yet somehow manages to project the loneliness, torment, and tenderness of a man who bends to misfortune as a tree bends to the wind. Had Foote given the character more to say, had the character explained himself in these lines, or had the actor fallen into hysterics, the moment would have been diminished. Fentry's affection for Sarah rises to break on his face and display itself only for a few moments after her death. This restrained style, which suggests meanings beyond the literal actions and words of the text, exemplifies a characteristic strength of Horton Foote's writing.

Although most of the action between Fentry and Sarah is confined to a single-room cabin, Foote created several new scenes for the movie that take advantage of the visual and physical freedom provided by the camera. He placed the

characters outside the cabin as much as possible, dramatizing the moment Fentry shares with Sarah his dream of building a house, Sarah's burial, and Fentry's difficult trip home with the baby. Beyond this, he used the natural surroundings of Faulkner's Mississippi homeland to evoke the emotional reality of the characters. For example, Sarah and Fentry, after they have been together about a month, are sitting in the cabin on a cold and rainy night. She begins to talk about floods, about Jesus walking on water, and concludes her monologue: "They say God is gonna destroy the world next time by fire" (129). Then she goes to the window, looks out, and a dissolve shows daytime, spring flowers, and Sarah seated in a chair watching Fentry boil clothes in an iron pot. She is in good spirits, and she questions whether her baby is going to be a boy or a girl. We see that Fentry and Sarah's relationship has become trusting, but we sense a foreboding in Sarah that she cannot shake, no matter how warming the sun or how comforting Fentry's attentions. Because Foote shows us the characters' lives in both their physical and emotional settings, we can empathize with their need for companionship and better understand Fentry's loss. The other additional sequences, such as Sarah's burial, enhance the film in much the same manner as does the montage of touching scenes that bridges the five years from Jackson and Longstreet's birth to the time when his uncles come to claim him. We see Fentry

joyfully picking cotton with the baby strapped to his back, tenderly lifting the boy in and out of his wagon, and playfully catching a fish for their supper. He cares for the child with a love that fulfills all the passion he was unable to express to Sarah. Foote no doubt had this series of images in mind when he remarked that "in film, the visual, sometimes in subtle ways, really takes over. The visual has an emotional impact that you can't get in the theatre, and you can get it better on film than on live television" ("The Visual Takes Over" 164).

Near its conclusion, the film returns to the courtroom where it began. There is a closeup of Fentry in the jury room some twenty years later. As he utters his final rejection for Bookwright's acquittal, we are reminded of the love that was shared by him and Sarah; and we recognize the nobility of this man who has endured the most painful suffering. Finally, as Fentry rides away on his mule, Thornton Douglas explains the farmer's reason for hanging the jury and expresses the story's central theme: man will not only endure but he will also prevail. Director Joseph Anthony points to Faulkner's theme as the primary reason for the lasting appeal of Tomorrow:

> To me, the universality of its theme is the meat of it, the power of it. The specific quality about the South is only color to me. The accents, the cotton fields, the wind, and the sawmill give it an authentic flavor. But if it were only a local portrait, it would not be as significant a piece of literature. The film is a reminder for humankind everywhere about primitive, basic needs

> and the wonderful quality of human beings who can endure under degradation and still remain magnificent and unique. (Anthony 180)

Faulkner's depiction of the inexhaustibility of the human spirit in "Tomorrow" is undoubtedly what attracted Horton Foote to the story, since he had spent most of his life exploring the same theme in his own writings. When asked about his faithful rendition of Faulkner's original work, Foote said: "I think Hollywood has so often failed with Faulkner because they insisted on improving him, for whatever reasons: trying to make him more palatable, more popular, more commercial. I think it would be well for any dramatist to give up this approach. Faulkner can be dramatized. He can't be improved" ("The Visual Takes Over" 166). In an interview in 1989, Foote commented further on his experiences with Faulkner's story:

> I learned a great deal with Tomorrow. I was on the set all the time. I was in the editing room. I learned that film really should be like theatre in the sense that in theatre, the writer is, of course very dominant to be quite frank. I mean we are sought after. We are at the rehearsals. If we don't like something, we speak our minds. We help with the casting. It is always a collaborative effort, and I am not one who believes in antagonism with the director--that it's the writer against the producer--I really think that it should be an enormous cooperation with everybody to achieve a final work of art. But in Hollywood, that wasn't so. A writer there has in his contract that you are a writer for hire, which means that you write a script, then it belongs to them. Then they can do what they want to, shoot it the way they want. God forbid that you should ever try to get on the set. They don't want you. But here I was and I felt a part of it, and I felt very creative about film again. (qtd. in Edgerton 7)

But as gratifying as the experience was for Foote, there were disappointments; despite its favorable notices when it opened in 1972, the movie did not receive wide distribution, much to the dismay of the producers who could not raise enough money to market the work properly. After a few scattered playdates around the country, Tomorrow sank into obscurity for more than ten years. Fortunately, the film's critical reputation continued to grow during this time; and after Foote and Duvall both won Oscars for Tender Mercies in 1983, Tomorrow resurfaced in a second release in major cities across the country. The film found an even wider audience in 1984, when it was telecast for the first time on PBS television.

Throughout the rest of the 1970s, Horton Foote continued writing for the stage and for television. He adapted The Displaced Person (1976) by Flannery O'Connor for PBS's Anthology, and Barn Burning (1978) by William Faulkner for PBS's American Playhouse. In 1979, he wrote a screenplay for his good friend Robert Duvall.

Tender Mercies, a tale about a country western singer and his efforts to piece his life back together gave Foote his second Oscar and Writers Guild Award and catapulted him into the most active period in his professional life at the age of sixty-seven. Foote and Duvall had originally hoped to produce Tender Mercies themselves, without any studio assistance; but they soon found that financial backing could

not be obtained for a film without stars and a script without obvious commercial appeals. Foote then took his script to Philip and Mary Ann Hobel, a couple who had produced over two hundred documentaries between them and whose approach to filmmaking was much like the writer's. The Hobels quickly agreed that Foote's script was the one they wanted for their debut as film producers. But they also had trouble in raising financial backing for the film. Finally, Horton Foote succeeded in gaining the confidence of EMI films, a British production company, which agreed to back the film based on the strength of the story and Robert Duvall's participation in the movie:

> After many months, a friend suggested it be sent to Barry Spikings and John Cohn at EMI. Cohn immediately read the screenplay and sent word that he and Spikings were interested. They suggested Bruce Beresford as a director. Beresford called from Australia to say that he liked the screenplay and that if he could get along with the writer, he would be happy to direct. He flew to New York to meet me, and we liked each other at once. Why did it take all this time to find a director and studio willing to finance and release our production? Why did they like it without any of the reservations others seem to have had? I've learned not to question things like that, only to be grateful that they did like it. (Foreword, Three Screenplays xiv-xv)

But Foote's obstacles continued; he also had trouble finding a studio to distribute the film after it was made. Shooting on Tender Mercies ended two days before Christmas 1981, but it was not until March 1983 (after the Academy Award nominations were announced) that Universal Studios finally agreed to release the motion picture. Foote doubted

for a time that his work would ever see the light of day; when the movie won an Academy Award for Best Film, he was no less astonished than the Hollywood executives who had initially refused to support the project. Yet, despite all the conflicts, a remarkable movie emerged. Film critic David Sterritt proclaimed: "Tender Mercies is a daring picture, tossing decades of Hollywood convention cheerfully out the window" (36).

The unique achievement of Tender Mercies (which had excellent performances from Robert Duvall, Tess Harper, Betty Buckley, Wilford Brimley, Ellen Barkin, and Allan Hubbard) must be attributed to Horton Foote's moving story and literate script, which represents the playwright's fullest expression of the complexities of human relationships and the need for sustaining family bonds.

Foote explains that the inspiration for Tender Mercies came from watching his nephew struggling to become a professional country-western musician:

> I began Tender Mercies in 1979 by making notes for a screenplay about five young country-western musicians who want to become full-time professionals, but a producer who knew of the story suggested that I needed an older man as the contrast to the young men. I began to think about this older man and who he could be to fit into this world of country music. I called him Mac Sledge, and I decided to make him a once-famous performer. When you work on material of your own, you go into an uncharted world. Everything has to be found--story, character, style. At that time, I had never known any famous country-western singers; but I had known famous actors and actresses whose careers had been ruined because of drunkenness and some who'd overcome alcoholism. I

> also knew about fame and loss of fame, ambition and loss of ambition. All my life I had known nonsinging Mac Sledges--pained, bewildered, inarticulate--good men really, at least with a desire to be good, whose lives were in a shambles, totally out of control. (Foreword, Three Screenplays xiv)

Foote's decision to shift the focus of his story to an older man not only strengthened the screenplay but it also gave the writer an opportunity to create one of his most memorable characters, Mac Sledge. Mac is the most effective realization of the typical Horton Foote hero, a lonely and broken man of integrity, struggling to regain a sense of order in his life with the aid of a gentle and steadfast woman. Much like the character of Henry Thomas, Mac Sledge is a man whose life and career in country music have been ravaged both by personal failures and by alcoholism. We are never actually shown the incidents that have led to his failure, or caused him to drift hopelessly from one town to another in search of a panacea for his pain. But brief flashes of dialogue and a series of scenes between Mac and his ex-wife, Dixie Scott, provide a glimpse of his troubled past.

Mac began his rocky road to stardom at a young age, roaming from town to town, playing in any roadhouse or honky-tonk bar that would hire him. When he was seventeen, he married; but the marriage quickly ended in divorce when his wife, unable to cope with the demands and pressures of her husband's lifestyle, ran off with another man.

Heartbroken, Mac began to write songs about his experiences; by the time he met his second wife, Dixie, he had cut a number of records and made a name for himself on the country-western circuit. For a while, Mac and Dixie shared a cordial relationship; but when Dixie refused to keep her promise to give up her singing career and then began making hits of Mac's songs, the marriage was doomed. Dixie's music career flourished while her husband's popularity plummeted. Eventually, Mac turned to the bottle to escape his feelings of failure and inadequacy, and his treatment of Dixie became extremely violent and abusive. At one point, he even attempted to kill his ambitious wife. Finally, Dixie, no longer able to tolerate the pain of their relationship asked for a divorce. When the film begins, Dixie's celebrity is at its height. Although she knows that her career has been firmly built upon the music and lyrics of her ex-husband, she has never forgiven Mac for his failure as a father and husband. For years, Dixie has successfully kept Mac away from his daughter, Sue Ann, by refusing to let her read the letters that he wrote to her and by prohibiting him from making contact with the girl. Dixie's anger pervades the film. In one scene she ferociously drives him away from her dressing room before he can even get a glimpse of Sue Ann, and in another she refuses to look at a song that he has written for her to record.

Now, after years of trying to drown his sorrow and regret in alcohol, Mac has awakened to find himself abandoned and penniless in a motel room on a desolate Texas highway. But unlike Henry Thomas, whose life is destroyed by his own misgivings and excesses, Mac is a survivor who manages to retain his convictions and his dignity. Slowly, he pieces his life back together with the help of Rosa Lee (played by Tess Harper), a young widow whose husband was killed in Vietnam and who has consequently been forced to raise her ten-year-old son alone from the meager profits of a motel and station. The love between Rosa Lee and Mac brings about the emotional and spiritual rehabilitation of the disillusioned singer, and their marriage alleviates the anguish that has haunted both their lives. Much like Jackson Fentry, Mac is a man of few words who finds it difficult to express his feelings. As the film progresses, he advances from despair to a man redeemed. Mac Sledge eventually finds contentment in a simple life with his wife and adopted son and he rediscovers the joys of writing and singing music. He also learns about the power of religious faith that has sustained Rosa Lee throughout her troubled life.

The title for Tender Mercies was taken from a verse in the Book of Psalms (79:8), where King David praises God for bestowing his tender mercies upon him. In its own understated manner, the film demonstrates the kind of

spiritual promise that defines this simple passage. Rosa Lee was raised to trust in the goodness and mercy of God. Her faith has been a source of strength that has seen her through the death of her first husband, her fears of rearing her child alone, and her struggles with Mac's alcoholism. Rosa Lee expects little from life, and her daily prayers offer simple expressions of gratitude for the peace and contentment that fills her soul: "It's all she asks for--certain moments of gentleness or respite. She has a sense of appreciation for what she has; it's nothing to do with grandness or largeness, but just thanks for a nice day or some such thing. Mac must learn to evaluate and appreciate this quality in her" (Sterritt 38).

Rosa Lee sings in the choir of the local Baptist church; she takes Mac there, where he is able to belt out hymns with powerful feeling. When Mac is ready, he is baptized, along with Sonny; and Rosa Lee finally witnesses both her husband and her son embrace the faith that sustained her through long widowhood. While Mac accepts Rosa Lee's religion, he does not fully comprehend the power of her faith, until he himself is faced with the death of his daughter Sue Ann.

One of the most moving scenes in the film occurs when Sue Ann (played by Ellen Barkin) comes to see her father after years of separation. Sue Ann wants to know about his harsh treatment of her mother, about his alcoholism, and

about his memories of their family. Mac answers her questions as honestly as he can, while carefully praising Dixie as a good mother; but when Sue Ann asks him to repeat the words of a song she vaguely remembers him singing to her when she was a child, he suddenly becomes reticent. Not wanting to come between the girl and her mother and too overcome with emotion to think clearly, he says that he does not recall any song about a dove, and watches helplessly as his daughter walks out of the house and out of his life. Mac walks to the window and begins to sing "On the Wings of a Dove," his voice expressing both love and anguish. The two have finally made emotional contact, but for Sue Ann this moment with her father came too late. A few days later, she is killed in a car wreck while eloping with a member of her mother's band. The news of her death is almost unbearable to Mac; and in his despair, he questions his trust in a God that could take the life of his only child.

> I was almost killed once in a car accident. I was drunk and ran off the side of the road and I turned over four times. They took me for dead, but I lived. And I prayed last night to know why I lived and she died, but I got no answer to my prayers. I still don't know why she died and I lived. I don't know the answer to nothing. Not a blessed thing. I don't know why I wandered out to this part of Texas drunk and you took me in and pitied me and helped me to straighten out and married me. Why, why did this happen? Is there a reason that happened? And Sonny's daddy died in the war. (Pause.) My daughter killed in an automobile accident. Why? You see, I don't trust happiness. I never did, I never will. (Three Screenplays 144-145)

Despite the confusion and hopelessness in Mac's confession, there is a profound irony to the moment since happiness is all around him in his music and in the love of his family. Rosa Lee has no answers for her husband's questions; rather, she offers him a reason to live, as well as a way to deal with his sorrow. Every night before she goes to bed, she thanks God for all his tender mercies, mercies that include her husband, her child, and their life together. Her family is all that truly matters to Rosa Lee, for it is the most precious of God's gifts. In the end, Mac embraces his wife's faith and survives his loss by drawing strength from this same wellspring of love and hope. The final scene of the film depicts Mac's healing process as he gives Sonny a football for a present and the two begin to toss the ball back and forth. Rosa Lee peers through the screen door with a look of contentment, and the melody of a country-western song is heard: "You're the good things I threw away/ Coming back to me every day/ You're the best it could ever be/ You are what loves means to me" (148). As the scene fades to black, we are left with the image of a family moving through the cycle of life empowered with a new sense of courage and dignity.

Tender Mercies (so well made that it is hard to believe it marked the first time that Foote had written directly for the screen) combines delicacy of detail with a credibly structured plot; the actions and language of the work are as

firm as human nature itself. Tender Mercies reveals Foote's perceptive understanding of the ephemeral nature of success, and his compassion for people beset with personal problems and professional disappointments. Too, the story of Mac Sledge resembles the story of the playwright himself, who repeatedly has survived the ups and downs of his career with the help of his wife Lillian. As the playwright's daughter Hallie admitted some years before her mother's death: "There's a kind of woman my father always writes--gentle but very strong. Often, they seem dependent on the man, but they exhibit this strength. These women survive and they do it with dignity. Rosa Lee in Tender Mercies is sort of fearless. She could allay the fears in Mac. And that's how my mother is. She believes so completely in my father and his talent. It's almost like she had a plan for him. She's the rock, she's the rock" (qtd. in Freeman xxi).

Horton Foote followed the success of Tender Mercies with The Trip To Bountiful (1985), a motion picture in which Geraldine Page became the third actor to win an Academy Award with a Foote screenplay. The movie was the story's third incarnation, for Foote had first written The Trip To Bountiful for NBC's Goodyear Playhouse in 1953; it went to the Broadway stage eight months later with the same leading actress, Lillian Gish, playing the role of Carrie Watts (See Chapter 3). In the succeeding decades, Foote received offers to adapt the play for the screen; but a movie never

materialized because the playwright could not agree with producers or directors on the casting of its protagonist. For over twenty years, Foote refused to allow the play to be filmed with any number of popular stars whom Hollywood producers proposed. Then, in the summer of 1984, Peter Masterson began looking around for a script to use in his first attempt at film directing. Masterson had thought about filming The Trip To Bountiful for some time, but the idea did not solidify until after a conversation at the Sundance Institute with his friend Robert Redford, who suggested that for his filmmaking debut he should choose a work that was both personally meaningful to him and economically feasible. Remembering the off-Broadway production of Bountiful he had seen in 1960, Masterson immediately called Foote (who happened to be his cousin) and asked about the possibility of bringing the stage play to the screen. Foote consented when he discovered that Masterson agreed with his choice of Geraldine Page for the role of Carrie Watts. Horton Foote remembers: "I thought that Geraldine would have an understanding of this particular kind of woman better than any of her contemporaries. She has a sense of place. Carrie Watts is a woman who's been through a great deal; there's a spiritual quality about her that keeps her going. She has a manifest strength from all sorts of unexpected sources. She's a survivor--and I think Geraldine grasps that" (qtd. in

Forsberg 21). Foote was certainly right about Geraldine Page, for much of the poignancy and power of the film can be attributed to the actress's performance, as well as to her supporting cast, which included John Heard as Ludie, Carlin Glynn as Jessie Mae, Rebecca DeMornay as Thelma, and Richard Radford as the Sheriff.

The Trip To Bountiful unfolds on the screen much like it did on television and on the stage (See Chapter 3). The movie, like the previous versions, offers a touching portrait of Mrs. Carrie Watts, who longs to run away from her Houston apartment, where she lives with her son and his nagging wife, in order to return to her home of Bountiful. Wanting only to embrace the memories of her past and to regain her dignity before she dies, Carrie plans and schemes until she has an opportunity to escape. Then with an indomitable will, she begins her lonely and treacherous journey back to the place of her birth. Along the way, she is aided by Thelma, the sympathetic young wife of a World War II soldier, and by a kindly Harrison sheriff whom her son and daughter-in-law have put on her trail. The sheriff allows Mrs. Watts to complete the final stage of her journey. But the old woman learns that the friends of her youth have all died or scattered, and her childhood house is no longer the spacious mansion of her memories but a crumbling wreck. She can remain at Bountiful only for a few minutes; but that is time enough to confront her memories

and plunge her hands into the earth of her homeplace. When Ludie and Jessie Mae appear to take her back to Houston, she quietly consents to return, secure in the knowledge that the remainder of her life will be enriched as a result of her final contact with Bountiful.

In adapting the play to the screen, Foote made few changes to his original script; but he did take advantage of the mobility of the camera in order to give his story a greater sense of reality.

> In neither the play nor the television version could Mrs. Watts' trip be fully dramatized, and that was a task I set for myself in writing the screenplay. I hoped to do this without turning it into a travelogue and diluting the power of the scenes that had served so well dramatically in the earlier versions. In my screenplay, Mrs. Watts takes a local bus from her apartment to the railroad station, then walks from the railroad station to the bus station, gets on a bus to Harrison, and finally is driven by car to her home in Bountiful. It wasn't much of a trip at all, really, and I hoped all this could be shown without sentimentality. Pete Masterson's direction and choice of location [the countryside of Dallas, Texas] and Geraldine Page's performance all supported and strengthened my vision of that part of the trip. (Three Screenplays xvii)

Among other creative elements which contributed to the mood of the film, the colorful photography of Fred Murphy and the musical score by composer J.A.C. Redford must be noted. Redford's background music for The Trip To Bountiful utilized guitars, hammer dulcimers, harmonica, accordion, and even a tin whistle to capture the spirit of Mrs. Watts' journey. Redford occasionally used strings behind the other instruments and, noting Foote's injunction that he remember

the hymns, he expanded the old Christian song Softly and Tenderly into a pervasive theme. Like the hymn, the music is calling her home, not just to the place of her birth, but to the roots of her existence. The refrain of the old Christian song and the essence of Horton Foote's screenplay are consonant: "Come home. Come home. Ye who are weary, come home, come home. Earnestly, tenderly Jesus is calling, Calling O sinner, come home" (219). As elsewhere in his fiction, Foote suggests here that if some people are broken by suffering, others like Mrs. Watts can be ennobled by it. Having completed her journey to Bountiful, Mrs. Watts accepts the necessity of returning to Houston to live out the remainder of her life. Like Mac Sledge and Jackson Fentry, Carrie Watts prevails amid trying circumstances with dignity and without complaint. "I've known people that the world has thrown everything at to discourage them, to break their spirit," Foote explains. "And yet something about them retains a dignity. They face life and they don't ask questions" (qtd. in Freedman 50).

After his success with Tender Mercies and The Trip to Bountiful (for which he won his third Academy Award nomination for screenwriting), Foote and his wife Lillian teamed up to test the waters of the then-growing world of independent film production. Foote had grown tired of the kind of studio interference that had plagued his earlier movies, and he believed that if he was to continue to

express himself through film, he had to gain greater control over all facets of his work: "I just feel you have to be in charge. And I felt that even on Tender Mercies I hadn't been in charge as much as I wanted to be. Bruce Beresford and I got along very well. But there were certain decisions I thought I would have made differently--at least wanted a chance to do differently" (qtd. in Barr and Wood 228). Foote's determination to gain such authority in a medium that customarily belongs to the director or to the producer would do much to invigorate filmmaking in the 1980s. In 1985, he and Lillian formed their own production company for the purpose of bringing to the screen The Orphans' Home, a series of nine plays loosely based on the lives of the playwright's parents and maternal grandparents in the first two decades of this century (See Chapter 1). Foote explains that he first began working on the cycle ten years earlier, following the death of his mother in 1974.

> The last two years of my mother's life was very difficult because my father lost his memory. That was hard because my father had always been so responsive to my mother, always. My mother had such strength but after my father died she experienced an enormous sense of loss. They had always been so close. Our cook Catherine Davis, a black woman who had been with my family many years, told me later that my mother would often say to her, 'I don't know what I'm going to do. He comes to me all the time and says you have to come on. I just can't make it without you.' Just before her death she picked out her dress to be buried in and I have always felt that she willed her death. It was very difficult for her. After she passed away I spent a week in Wharton, sorting through personal letters and papers and making decisions about what to do with the accumulations

> of fifty-nine years of life in that house. When I returned to New Hampshire, I thought a lot about my parents and I began making notes for these plays. (Foote interview, 18 Nov. 1988)

For more than two years, Foote worked on the cycle while sitting beside his New Hampshire fireplace, listening to the symphonic music of Charles Ives and remembering the stories his father had told him about his life. By 1976, he had finished drafts of eight scripts--Roots In A Parched Ground, Convicts, Lily Dale, Courtship, Valentine's Day, 1918, Cousins, and The Death of Papa--and later he completed the project with The Widow Claire. At that time, Foote had no definite plans for any of the plays; but in 1978, Herbert Berghof convinced him to mount experimental productions of three of the works, Courtship, Valentine's Day, and 1918, at the HB Playwrights Foundation in New York. The success of these productions, along with the encouragement of his wife and children, gave impetus to Foote's dream of bringing The Orphans' Home to the screen. To date, four of the plays have been filmed (1918 (1985), On Valentine's Day (1986), Courtship (1987), and Convicts (1991)) while the remaining five are presently in various stages of preparation and pre-production. Each of the works has been made on a modest budget of less than two million dollars, about one-tenth that spent on an average Hollywood movie, enabling Foote to control every aspect of filmmaking from writing the script, to rehearsing the actors, to editing the finished work. The control that Foote gained has permitted him to tell his

familial stories in his own unique way, free from the intrusions of others. While he admits that independent filmmaking is "a lonely row to hoe," it is ultimately "the only way to go if you want your works done correctly" (Foote interview, 18 Nov. 1988).

The Orphans' Home demonstrates how the writer has remained a cultural historian throughout his career. While each of the nine plays is a complete drama in its own right, together they form a moral and social history of Foote's family from 1902 to 1928 that, in the words of Reynolds Price, stands "near the center of our largest American dramatic achievements" (Price xiii). The initial play in the cycle, Roots In A Parched Ground, is a reshaping of the 1961 teleplay The Night of the Storm, which dramatizes the tragedy surrounding the estrangement of Horace Robedaux's parents, his father's untimely death, and his mother's remarriage to Pete Davenport, an insensitive man, who refuses to accept the boy into his family. Horace, the fictive re-incarnation of Foote's father, grows up in transient fashion with extended relatives who cannot provide the love he so desperately needs. Both versions of the story celebrate Horace's ability to endure the misfortunes that threaten his life. But beyond Horace's familial tragedy, the play employs the larger theme of the decline of the cotton plantation aristocracy and the rise of the mercantile class in the Gulf Coast region of Texas. Foote

explains that the setting of the plays (1902 to 1928) is a time of far reaching social and economic change in Texas: "The aftermath of Reconstruction and its passions have brought about a white man's union to prevent blacks from voting in local and state elections. But in spite of political and social acts to hold onto the past, a way of life was over; and the practical, the pragmatic were scrambling to form a new economic order. Black men and women were alive who knew the agony of slavery, and white men and women were alive who owned them" (Four Plays From The Orphans' Home Cycle xii-xiii).

In the cycle's second play, Convicts, Foote explores the evil effects that this disorder had upon the people of his native region. Filmed in 1989, in the cotton fields of LaPlace, Louisiana, the story begins after young Horace (played by Lucas Haas) has been separated from his family for more than a year. During that time, he has worked on the Gautier plantation, which is farmed by black convicts from a nearby prison. There, while supporting himself and trying to earn enough money to buy a tombstone for his father's unmarked grave, the boy has been subjected to the inhumanity of slavery and to the insanity of Soll Gautier (Robert Duvall), the embittered and greedy old plantation owner. When the film opens on Christmas Eve, 1903, Horace has been abandoned by his extended family and left to spend the holiday on the farm. Here, in the span of a single day,

he witnesses beatings, lynchings, and the murder of a black convict by a county sheriff who earns his income in proportion to the number of prisoners he leases to old Soll. Horace, surrounded by agony on every side, is forced to watch helplessly as a half-white convict is worked to death in the fields; he must also contend with the drunken madness of old Soll, who fearing that the prisoners are plotting to kill him repeatedly fires his rifle at imaginary murderers. Soll refuses to pay Horace the twelve dollars and fifty cents he owes him in wages; but since they are the only two white people on the plantation, the garrulous old man befriends the boy and convinces him to sit with him during his death. Watching the old man's demise teaches the thirteen-year-old child a great deal about the mysteries of death as well as the realities of life in a separatist society.

The film version of Convicts, directed by Peter Masterson, successfully recreates the turbulent world of Foote's imagination. Film images of a weed-choked graveyard remind the viewer of the harshness of the setting, and the performances of Robert Duvall, Lucas Haas, James Earl Jones, and the other principal players, contribute to our understanding of the confusion and moral decay that besets Foote's characters. Isolated in some degree from one another, the characters are trapped by a past they neither cherish nor comprehend. None are more lonely and secluded

than Soll Gautier. A once celebrated Civil War hero, he hates his greedy brother Tyre and feels contempt for his drunken niece and her husband (Asa and Billy Vaughn) who have been waiting for him to die for years so that they could inherit his property. He resents the blacks who labor in his fields, and his years of prejudice toward them have brought the old man nothing but bitterness and pain. Soll's distrust has driven him insane, as evidenced by his fear that a convict, lurking in his bedroom closet, is waiting to kill him in his sleep. The only people that Soll feels comfortable around are Horace, and Ben and Martha Jackson, a black couple who were born and raised as slaves on the Gautier plantation. But even their kindness cannot keep the old man from suffering a terrifying and degrading death. In the movie's final scene, young Horace witnesses Ben slowly cover the grave of Soll Gautier. Ben explains to the boy: "Six months from now you won't know where anybody's buried out here--not my people, not the convicts, not Mr. Soll. The trees and the weeds, and the cane will take everything. Caneland, they called it once; caneland it will be again. The house will go, the store will go, the graves will go--those with tombstones and those without" (Convicts 120). Throughout the film, young Horace is subjected to an array of violent and fearful acts, but he survives his ordeal through the love and tenderness of Ben and Martha. They foster in him a lifelong affection for black people, who as

Foote explains: "were otherwise invisible to Southern whites in those years" (Foote interview, 18 Nov. 1988).

Horace's story continues in Lily Dale when he travels to Houston to visit his mother and narcissistic sister Lily Dale with whom he has lost touch since his father's death. When the play begins, Horace, twenty years old, is employed as a clerk in a store in Glen Flora, a three-hour walk from Harrison. He has not heard from his family for over a year; so when Corella sends word in a letter that she would like to see him, Horace eagerly accepts, ever hopeful of renewing his relationship with his family and of possibly finding more promising work on the railroad with his stepfather. But Horace's reunion with his mother and sister evolves into an emotional nightmare that eventually leaves him an orphan in spirit if not in name. In Houston, Horace discovers that the only reason he can spend time with his mother and sister is that his irascible step-father is away in Atlanta visiting relatives; and when Pete unexpectedly returns from his trip, he quickly orders Horace to leave. Pete's harsh behavior upsets Horace, and he eventually falls prey to an emotional breakdown that forces him to remain in Houston several weeks under the care of his mother. While recovering from his illness, Horace has one last chance to restore his troubled relationship with Lily Dale; but he discovers that her memories of the past and her feelings for their late father are as resentful as his are forgiving.

Horace understands the importance of coming to terms with his heritage, no matter how troubling; but Lily refuses to face this truth. "I want to forget everything that happened back then, everything," Lily Dale screams. "I want my children to know about happy times, pleasant things. I don't want to tell them about drunkards and dying and not having enough to eat. And I want you to quit talking to me about it" (Four Plays From The Orphan's Home Cycle 231).

Lily Dale's vanity, coupled with her mother's refusal to stand up to her husband Pete, further isolates Horace from his family, and he eventually leaves Houston emotionally scarred. Yet, somehow, after confronting the demons of his family's past, Horace is able to rise above his pain and to face the uncertainties of the future with a sense of dignity and courage.

When Horace returns to Harrison, he leads for a time a somewhat wild and reckless life-style, drinking, smoking, and gambling. When we next see him in The Widow Claire, it is 1911, and the young man is preparing for a date with the attractive widow, Claire Ratliff. It is apparent that Horace's affections for Claire will eventually lead to disappointment as his friends tease him about her reputation of dating several men at one time and warn him about her two boisterous children, Buddy and Molly. Horace, unmoved by their jokes, genuinely cares for Claire; but during the course of the evening, he finds that their warnings and

premonitions are true. Claire Ratliff, struggling to pick up the pieces of her life after the unexpected death of her husband the year before, describes to Horace her feelings of desperation from being a twenty-eight-year-old woman with two children to rear:

> I thought I was so in love with my husband when I married him that I didn't worry if he was rich or not. He didn't leave me destitute, you know. He left me this house and two rent houses. Sissy nags me all the time to marry again, find someone who is fond of children. But not me. I'm twenty-eight, and I've been married twelve of those twenty-eight-years--a mother for ten of them. (Four Plays From The Orphans' Home Cycle 279)

Claire dreams of a life free from family responsibilities but her situation demands that she marry a man who will dominate her completely in exchange for taking care of her children. She is drawn to Horace because of his kindness and honesty; but Horace, who has no job and very little money, knows that he cannot throw himself into such an arrangement at this time. By night's end, the young man is as defeated in his try at courtship as he was in Lily Dale when he tried to rescue his mother and sister from their bewildering family life.

Time after time, Claire's ten-year-old son Buddy turns up at Horace's boarding house, even after Horace has retired for the evening, to pester him and call him back to his mother's place for one reason or another. Horace remains unruffled by the boy's requests, even though he and Claire are barely able to kiss or talk without the children

clamoring to be sung to or told a story. Nor does he wince when the widow asks him which of two men, Val or Ned, she should choose to marry. Horace's trips grow more frustrating; however, and he is finally drawn into a fistfight with the abusive Val Stanton. Claire stands helplessly by as Horace is severely beaten by the stronger suitor, but the incident awakens her to the decision she must make by morning. The next day, Horace stops by Claire's house, where he learns that the widow has decided to marry Ned, an elderly but wealthy salesman from Galveston. Claire has chosen to sacrifice her own dreams and marry a man she does not really love in order to secure for her children a promising future. Horace, reconciling himself to yet another defeat, waves goodbye to Claire. As Claire watches him walk away we are left with the haunting portrait of a time and place where life seemed simpler but was, in fact, filled with the same kind of disappointment and compromise as our present age.

Horace finds no substitute for his devastating loneliness in The Widow Claire, but his life changes for the better when in Courtship he finally meets Elizabeth Vaughn, the beautiful and serene daughter of a wealthy Harrison businessman. Courtship, filmed in Brookhaven, Mississippi, in 1986, tells the story of the couple's budding romance and of Elizabeth's courage to follow her instincts and marry the man she loves, despite his lower social standing and her

family's adamant rejection and disapproval. Set in 1915, on a warm summer's evening, the film offers a mosaic of conversations between Elizabeth (Hallie Foote), and her younger sister Laura (Amanda Plummer), which occur on the front veranda of the Vaughn's Victorian house. Through the girls' intermittent discussions, we learn of their fears of growing up, their frustrations with the repressive family environment in which they live, and their eagerness to break free from the restraints imposed upon them by their strait-laced parents. The Vaughn's are substantial, God-fearing people who expect their children to accept the standards by which they themselves have lived even though those standards are often unreasonable and unfair. When the film opens, Elizabeth's father, Henry Vaughn, has forbidden his daughter from attending the community dance with Horace (William Converse-Roberts) because he cannot tolerate dancing and does not approve of Horace as a suitable companion. Henry Vaughn (skillfully played by Michael Higgins) seems at first to be a domestic tyrant and monster of possessiveness. However, as the evening wears on, we come to appreciate his parental anxiety and fears when Elizabeth and Laura speak of the horrifying stories of elders who were victimized by the same sins against which they have been warned, when they discuss Elizabeth's heartbreaking engagement to Syd Joplin, and when they recount the tragic plight of young Sybil Thomas, who on this day marries a man she does not love and

then dies from complications surrounding the birth of her pre-mature baby. But the message of the film is not about the deleterious effects of family oppression, the evils of divorce or alcoholism, or even about the tragedy of death. Courtship is a love story as seen through the eyes of a young woman, Elizabeth Vaughn, who within a climate of heartbreak and confusion courageously announces her determination to break free from the restraints that have been bequeathed her in order to marry the orphaned salesman, Horace Robedaux.

The movie version of Courtship captures the dramatic world of Horton Foote by weaving a tapestry of ordinary events, everyday conversations, and skillfully drawn characters that ring true to life. From the gas-lit houses to the wicker porch swings, the movie is rich in small details that enhance the atmosphere of the period; and the small cast of actors, under the guidance of director Ken Harrison, vividly recreate the strength and integrity of this family so fondly remembered by the playwright. Hallie Foote radiantly performs the role of her own grandmother and namesake. Miss Foote's ability to portray the inner strength and beauty of Elizabeth Vaughn is also evident in On Valentine's Day and 1918, which were filmed prior to Courtship.

On Valentine's Day, set on Christmas Eve, 1917, begins almost a year after Elizabeth and Horace's elopement and

marriage. Expecting their first child, they have taken up residence in the parlor of a once-gracious Victorian house where they carry out their daily routines and interact with an odd assortment of people. These include Miss Ruth (Carol Goodheart), a lonely spinster; Bobby Pate (Richard Jenkins), a troubled young man who has allowed a failed marriage and runaway wife to turn him into the town drunk; and cousin George Tyler (Steven Hill), a dignified old Southern gentleman, whose increasing insanity cannot help but touch the lives of everyone around him. Despite the occasional intrusion of friends and neighbors, Horace and Elizabeth's marriage is secure; and for the first time in his life, Horace is happy and content. "I am no orphan, but I think of myself as an orphan, belonging to no one but you," he admits to Elizabeth. "I intend to have everything I didn't have before. A house, some land, a yard, I will plant growing things, fruitful things, and I will have a garden and chickens. And I believe I might now have these things, because you married me" (Three Plays From The Orphans' Home Cycle 82-83).

Horace's dreams seem to be within reach when Mr. Vaughn, in a spirit of reconciliation, announces that he is prepared to deed the couple a parcel of land and build them a new house next to his own. Horace accepts Mr. Vaughn's gracious offer, with the stipulation that the deed be made out in the name of Elizabeth; but he proudly rejects his

father-in-law's attempt to finance his opening of a haberdashery. The family does not resolve all of its differences by the end of the film, but the healing process has begun and together they happily anticipate the birth of a new baby into the family. Yet, beneath the gossiping pleasantries and discreet reconciliations lies a psychic turbulence that threatens the family's happiness. Elizabeth's ne're-do-well younger brother (played by Matthew Broderick) succumbs to alcoholism and gambling, and Mr. George Tyler is driven to madness by the haunting ghost of Horace's Aunt Mary, whose love he had betrayed some thirty years before. Because George Tyler's son looks out for him with devotion, he has escaped confinement in an institution, even after threatening to kill his wife with a butcher knife. But as the story unfolds, his confusion and desperation escalate until he commits suicide on the town square. Both Horace and Elizabeth show their resourcefulness and strength of character as they cope with these tragedies, but we sense that their lives will soon be touched in a more profound way.

Change is the one dramatic certainty in Horton Foote's dramatic world. All his characters are consistently forced to cope with the knowledge that time continually erodes their traditions, their family bonds, and their social identities (Edgerton 6). In the seventh play of the cycle, 1918, Horace and Elizabeth must contend with the effects of

a worldwide influenza epidemic and the death of their only child. Filmed in 1985 near Waxahachie, Texas, the same town where Tender Mercies was made, the movie opens on a hot autumn day in 1918 as the citizens of Harrison are doing their patriotic best to protect the home front from the war in Europe. The women of the community spend their days at the Red Cross rolling bandages, the men drill in the town brigade every afternoon, and all participate in parades and patriotic songs with an optimistic attitude that the conflict will soon be over. While the town is preparing for the unexpected, Horace, Elizabeth, and their baby daughter, Jenny, have settled into the new home built for them by Mr. Vaughn. At first glance, Horace and Elizabeth's fortunes seem full of hope and promise as their dry cleaning business is prosperous, their marriage is happy and secure, and their nine month old daughter Jenny has brought a new sense of joy and reconciliation to their family. However, life for the Robedaux family is far less serene than it appears. Brother Vaughn has just flunked out of Texas A&M and has become a major worry to his parents. While many of Harrison's native sons have gone off to fight overseas, Brother spends his days sitting in movie houses, watching glorified images of war heroes on the silent screen, and gambling away his father's money. Having gotten a young girl pregnant and piled up heavy gambling debts while away at school, Brother fears telling his father the truth about his situation. He

turns to Elizabeth who loans him money from her savings to pay for the young girl's abortion. Brother wants to enlist in the army in spite of his father's objection; and by the end of the film, their relationship has been irreversibly damaged.

Unlike Brother Vaughn, Horace has helped the war effort as much as he could by committing his entire savings of $4000 in the latest Liberty Bond drive. He has not felt free to enlist in the military because of his responsibility to Elizabeth and the baby; but to squelch any suspicion that he is afraid to fight, he announces to his friends that if it weren't for his family he would immediately sign up for duty. Mr. Vaughn overhears Horace's remark and offers to care for Elizabeth and Jenny while he is away in Europe. Horace is shocked by his father-in-law's generosity; but before he can tell Mr. Vaughn the truth, both men fall prey to the influenza that has been randomly attacking the town. Weeks later, when Horace awakens from his delirious nightmare, he discovers that his wife and daughter had also contracted the flu; and while Elizabeth survived the sickness, Jenny died the week before. Elizabeth tries to comfort Horace but the baby's death brings a sadness to the couple which nothing can allay, not even the welcome announcement that an armistice has been declared.

Foote explains that 1918 is about imagined death and real death: "The imagined death is the fantasy that I'm sure

many young men were having during World War I, of what would happen if they went overseas--about how they might die. But the real death that came in silently and unobtrusively was the horrendous flu epidemic. It killed more people than the war" (Foote interview, 18 Nov. 1988).

Certainly, death and grief reverberate throughout 1918, but the film is ultimately a tribute to human endurance. Despite Elizabeth and Horace's tragic loss, in time, they are drawn back into the world of Harrison by their friends, their family, and the birth of their second child. The couple looks forward to a more peaceful time where, in the words of Mr. Vaughn, there is: "no sickness, no killings, and no war" (175). Perhaps New York Times critic Nina Darnton best summed up the mood that Foote created in the film when she stated that 1918 "is an evocation and celebration of family and community relationships in a small Texas town [during] an innocent, optimistic period in American life. [It is] almost a nostalgic eulogy to a pre-industrial era when a man could surmount loss, endure war, and rise above his class by the kind of value structure and support derived from personal relationships--even if those relationships involved considerable pressures and conflicts" (17).

The eighth play of the cycle, Cousins (set in 1925), opens in Horace Robedaux's clothing store during one of the most economically depressed periods in Harrison's history.

The town has not prospered since the end of World War I when the demand for cotton declined, and now the heavy summer rains have taken away what little hope farmers and merchants have for a productive harvest. Horace's fortunes have been greatly affected by the Depression, and he has had to borrow heavily from the bank to keep his store open. But even though he is worried about the town's failing economy, he has managed to keep his business afloat by catering to black laborers. This practice, has infuriated many people in Harrison, including his own relatives who refuse to "go in his store because of all the colored trade" (Two Plays From the Orphans' Home Cycle 8). During the play, Horace must not only contend with the racial biases of his friends and family; but he must also deal with his sister's selfish behavior and his mother's failing health. Horace learns that Corella desperately needs an operation. Her illness is the result of physical and emotional exhaustion brought on by her unceasing worry for Lily Dale, who selfishly allowed her mother to care for her family while she practiced her piano. Even worse, Lily Dale secretly blames her mother's poor condition on Horace's devotion to Cousin Minnie Robedaux. Remarkably, through all the bickering and condemnation Horace maintains his dignity; and there is even a moment when he and his mother reconcile their differences.

Everyone in Cousins must face his or her own demons; and in the play's final scene, even the selfish Lily Dale

learns that life does not always work out as planned. Her dream of becoming a famous musician is foiled when a thief, masquerading as a music publisher, disappears with her two thousand dollar investment. For the first time in her life, Lily Dale must cope with the kind of personal humiliation and disappointment that her brother has been subjected to for years. Horace resumes his life and reenters the workday world of Harrison with a clearer understanding of what it means to be part of a family. "A family is a remarkable thing," Cousin Minnie reminds him. "You belong. And then you don't. It passes you by. Unless you start a family of your own" (Two Plays From The Orphans' Home Cycle 92).

Foote concludes The Orphans' Home Cycle with his most autobiographical work, The Death of Papa, which dramatizes the death of his maternal grandfather and the enormous change that the patriarch's passing brought to his family. Reflecting upon the importance of this event in his own life, Foote has stated:

> My grandfather, who seemed impervious to all mortal ends, died when I was nine, and the reverberations and changes from that death continued for many years. It was soon after that I was to see a quiet, serene street (in front of my grandparents' house) begin its slow but steady descent into a metaphor for all the ugly, trashy highways that scar a great deal of small-town America. And these plays, I feel, are about change, unexpected, unasked for, unwanted, but to be faced and dealt with or else we sink into despair or a hopeless longing for a life that is gone. (Four Plays From The Orphans' Home Cycle xii)

Mr. Vaughn's death signals the end of an era. Elizabeth and Horace learn to cope with the death of another loved one, while Mrs. Vaughn faces life without her companion, and Brother Vaughn comes to accept his inability to live up to his father's image. Much of The Death of Papa revolves around Brother's failure to hold onto the land and modest fortune that his father left behind to support his family. Ultimately, the play affirms family life; the orphaned Horace Robedaux emerges as a man fully connected to his home. "I used to feel sorry for you when you would come and call on Elizabeth," Brother admits to Horace. "I'd hear Papa and Mama talking and they said you were practically an orphan and had no home. Now you have a home and I don't." (Two Plays From The Orphans' Home Cycle 194). Horace has overcome humiliation, sorrow, and death, in order to build for himself and his family an orphans' home, a sacred place of stability and renewal that will help them weather further tragedies.

The Orphans' Home, although drawn from Foote's family history, transcends its historical origins to suggest meanings about the human condition far beyond the pale of one family in southeast Texas. Reynolds Price explains:

> For what these texts--and his recent films--demonstrate is how unquestionably Foote is the supreme musician among our great American playwrights. From the bare lines of Horton Foote's original text--and nowhere else really, except the voluble faces of the actors--there pours forth finally a joyful and unanswerably powerful psalm of praise: Suffering (to the point

> of devastation) is the central human condition and our most unavoidable mystery. Yet we can survive it and sing in its face. The only tonal parallels that come easily to mind--for similar findings, wisdom, and credibility--are the conclusion of A Long Day's Journey into Night or the rapturous final claim of Checkov's Uncle Vanya. Yet even they, for all their grandeur of human love and pardon, are not bolstered by such glacial weight of evidence as Foote provides . . . rich as [the cycle] is in all the emotions from farce to tragedy to transcendence. (xii)

In recent years, Horton Foote has adapted two more novels for the screen, Bette B. Lord's Spring Moon in 1989 and John Steinbeck's Of Mice and Men in 1992. Although these works do not mark any significant development or change in Foote's career, they do demonstrate that his powers as a screenwriter and dramatist are undiminished. Foote's adaptation of Of Mice and Men remains faithful to Steinbeck's classic story of Lennie Small (played by John Malkovich) and George Milton (performed by Gary Sinise), two unemployed migrant workers in Depression torn California who encounter unexpected cruelty and violence. Directed by Gary Sinise and filmed on location in Santa Ynez, California, the film offers a renewed sense of the urgency of Steinbeck's powerful message. "The times are conspiring to help us," Foote told Kevin Phinney, critic for Premiere magazine. "You have people going hungry and living in the streets. I think Gary and John will get us out of all the cliched ways we've thought of George and Lenny. I think they're bringing a lot of freshness to the roles, and because of the great chemistry they bring through their own years of friendship,

we're seeing the characters like we're seeing them for the first time" (qtd. in Phinney 70).

Horton Foote has been writing steadily for the screen for more than thirty years. He has won two Academy Awards, been nominated for a third, and has established himself as one of America's foremost independent filmmakers. Since Foote's films are accessible for viewing as reruns on television, in revival houses, and on videocassette they continue to be seen, just as his screenplays continue to be read. This is no small achievement for a writer who once declared that he wanted nothing to do with the commercialism of Hollywood. "There was a time," Foote admits, "if you had asked me if I preferred writing for theatre or films, I would have said, without hesitation, the theatre. Now, I would hate to give up either. With the rise of independent film production, a screenwriter has increased opportunities to see his work reach the screen as he envisioned it. I'm no Pollyanna about such matters, however. The struggle of writers to be free of interference is constant, not only in films, but on Broadway and off. (Three Screenplays xviii)

CHAPTER 5
THEMES AND VARIATIONS: THE LATE PLAYS OF HORTON FOOTE

By the end of the 1970s, Foote had created more drama than any time since the early fifties, when he was a writer of television scripts for NBC. In 1978, he returned to the stage to direct three plays from his newly created Orphans' Home Cycle at the HB Playwrights Foundation in New York, and in 1983, he released his film Tender Mercies. The success of these productions sparked a revival of interest in Foote's drama; by the mid-eighties, such regional theatre groups as the Loft Theatre, the Ensemble Studio Theatre, and the Manhattan Punch Line Theatre were presenting premieres of his newer plays as well as revivals of his older pieces. In 1985, Foote had four plays running concurrently in New York. In the next year, Foote, at age seventy, was called "Dramatist of the Hour" by Dallas Times-Herald drama critic Don Hulbert.

During the years when few of his works were being staged, Foote completed at least twenty new plays. In addition to The Orphans' Home Cycle and Tender Mercies, he penned two full-length dramas, Night Seasons (the story of an aging mother's attempt to make peace with her daughter) and The Habitation of Dragons (which will be discussed later in this chapter). He also wrote a series of one-act plays, such as In a Coffin in Egypt, The Man Who Climbed Pecan Trees, The One Armed Man, and The Roads to Home. These

plays, like those he created during the Golden Age of television drama, reveal a continuity in style and theme. Many of the works offer variations on plots, characters, and motifs which had surfaced years earlier; in them Foote explores such familial subjects as the erosion of traditional values, the quest for emotional and spiritual fulfillment, the break-up of the family, and the repressive forces within the small Southern community of Harrison.

Although linked to Foote's earlier writings, these later plays are marked by subtle dissimilarities in mood and characterization. Gerald Wood points out that many of the "earlier plays tend to be . . . more affirmative than the later ones" and "the conflicts in the dramas of the fifties tend to be more clearly defined for both characters and audience than . . . in his later work" (xv). Characters cannot always cope with adversity in these later plays. OFten they seem distrubed by a "sense of physical and emotional dislocation," and "a profound loss of identity and meaning." Foote's dark images reflect "the breakdown of the traditional social contracts" that mark the troubled decades of the 1960s and 70s (266).

Certainly, these twenty years (1960-1980) had a lasting effect upon Horton Foote, for it was during this period that he began to question his future as a writer and to take notice of the disorder that was crippling American society. The playwright has admitted that he felt lost since he

neither approved of what was happening in the theatre nor understood what was taking place in the country: "The drugs, the racial tensions. I didn't want my children mixed up in all of that. They wouldn't understand [the racial problem] because they had gone to school with black children all their lives. I didn't know what the hell was going on" (qtd. in Barr 164). He was also confused by other events, such as the war in Southeast Asia, the shocking assassinations of national leaders, the destruction of the environment, the conquest of space, and the restlessness and rebellion of America's youth. Like other Americans, Foote watched as the country suffered violence, racism, and economic upheaval. But perhaps even more distressing to Foote was the realization that his own private world was changing as well. During the early seventies, Foote was forced to cope with the death of his parents and to stand helplessly by as his hometown of Wharton was enveloped by sprawling urban expansion and technological advancement. Almost overnight, Wharton evolved from an insular community of thirty-five hundred people to a suburb of nearby Houston with a population of nearly ten-thousand inhabitants. The cotton fields, in which Foote had roamed as a child, were replaced by tract houses, motels, and apartment buildings; and the downtown area, where his father had owned a clothing store for more than fifty years, was neglected for the convenience of nearby shopping centers. Richmond Road,

which for decades had been a quiet and serene street shaded by oak and sycamore trees, was converted into a dismal stretch of asphalt flanked by a car wash and a fast-food restaurant.

Writers have often cited America's break with tradition as one of the most disturbing legacies of the 1960s and 70s. Sociologist Hazel Hertzburg explains that this generation of Americans judged little in man's past as worthy of saving, and thereby created a society "characterized by a sense of estrangement from the generations above and below it." Novelist Norman Mailer echoed Hertzburg's sentiments when he wrote, "We're in a time that's divorced from the past. There's utterly no tradition anymore," and historian John Gardner warned against the evil effects of technology and the destruction of the environment when he stated that people will get "richer and richer in filthier communities until we reach a final state of affluent misery" (Leuchtenbeurg 857-858). In Horton Foote's most recent plays characters search for peace and contentment in a world that has been drastically altered by industrialism and changing socio-economic conditions. Foote writes, by his own admission, to discover to recover a sense of order and meaning "out of what sometimes seems just total confusion" (qtd. in Barr and Wood 277). He uses his memories of Wharton to create the Harrison of his imagination, where he can explore the problems of contemporary America and render

them meaningful on his own terms. As Foote envisions it, life is change, which often brings heartache and despair.

The one-act play In a Coffin in Egypt, originally produced at the HB Studio Theatre in New York in 1980, vividly expresses this theme. Set in the present, In a Coffin in Egypt centers around ninety-year-old Myrtle Bledsoe, who having reached the end of her life, is trying to make peace with her past and accept the inevitability of her death. In an evocative monologue, Myrtle expresses her innermost fears to her unconcerned nursemaid, Jessie Lydell, as the two women sit together in the drawing room of Myrtle's Victorian mansion (located near the small farming community of Egypt, Texas). When the play begins, Myrtle's mind is flooded with happy thoughts about the days she spent as a young bride, her exciting trips to Europe and New York, and the grand lifestyle she enjoyed as the wife of a Southern aristocrat. She proudly recalls her youthful beauty and intelligence, her talent as an actress, her two children, and the people who helped to shape her character. At first glance, Myrtle appears to have lived a life of Southern propriety; but as she continues to ramble from one fragmented memory to another, a psychic turbulence starts to emerge from beneath her calm and restrained voice. While Myrtle enjoyed great wealth and position, she also suffered misery and shame at the hands of her faithless husband, Hunter. Bitterly, she speaks about her loveless marriage,

about her husband's affair with the young mulatto woman, Maude Jenkins, and about Hunter's fraudulent relationship with a seventeen-year-old girl, Iris, whose father he later killed after the man confronted him with the corruption of his daughter. She also recalls her many unrequited chances for happiness with the man she really loved, Captain Lawson, and her neglected opportunities to pursue a career as an actress. Lacking the courage to follow her instincts, Myrtle ignored her needs for more than seventy years and remained with Hunter until his death. Now, as her life draws to an end, Myrtle recognizes that she has cheated herself. She yearns to return to an earlier time when, as an innocent nineteen-year-old bride, she first set eyes upon the lush cotton fields and prairies of Egypt. "If I could have one day to live over before I die," she admits, "do you know what I'd choose? I'd choose one of those lovely clear spring days, we used to have out here when I came here first as a bride and I'd get my horse and ride across the prairie at sunrise to the East and ride all day on and on" (In a Coffin in Egypt 41). Myrtle laments a life that can never be restored. The world for which she yearns, no longer exists, and Myrtle has become a tragic victim of time, trapped by her own limitations and eccentricities. "I used to tell Hunter that when I died I wanted to be cremated and have my ashes taken to one of the beautiful places I'd known as a young woman," she recalls, "but now, I don't care. Who

is there left to take my ashes anywhere? Anyway, they have a place for my body between Hunter's grave and my two girls and that's where I'll end. In a coffin in Egypt. This Egypt. Out on the prairie" (56). Reminiscent of The Trip to Bountiful, In a Coffin in Egypt expresses the need for every person to have a spiritual and emotional home and the importance of squaring up memories with reality before completing life's journey. But unlike Carrie Watts, Myrtle Bledsoe does not discover a sense of dignity in the final stage of her life; instead, having reached the end of her road, she finds nothing but despair and hopeless resignation. With no past to which she can belong and with no future to which she can look forward, Myrtle exists from day to day by withdrawing into a world of illusion. There is much to admire in the character of Myrtle Bledsoe, such as her intelligence, her charm, and her devotion to family, but her story finally implies that those who ignore their better judgements and forsake their dreams often end their days bitter and rueful.

The Man Who Climbed the Pecan Trees also depicts emotional and spiritual dislocation; but rather than revealing the effect of change upon the very old, the play shows the extent to which young people are often haunted by personal misfortune and social pressures. Foote has said that the seeds of this play go back to 1930, five years

after the death of his Grandfather Brooks. "See that pecan tree up yonder," Foote told Samuel Freedman, "When my grandfather gave his land to the city, there was a pecan tree bigger than that on it. There was a gentleman's understanding they'd never cut the tree down. Well, part of me says I don't understand not honoring things ancient, things like trees, families. And part of me says that I don't believe in the aristocracy" (qtd. in Freedman 61-62). Both of these impulses come together in The Man Who Climbed the Pecan Trees. First produced by the Loft Theatre in Los Angeles in 1982, the play is set in Harrison during the years of the Great Depression. Mrs. Campbell, an aging widow, has resigned herself to the formidable task of caring for her three grown sons, who have become a source of disappointment and concern to her. While Mrs. Campbell's husband was alive, she dreamed of keeping the family together by building houses for the children next to her own; but following his death and the loss of the family's fortune, her expectations have collapsed. The old woman clings pathetically to the hope that her sons will be successful and happy; but without their father's stabilizing presence, the boys succumb to stressful social pressures. One of her boys, Brother, has become so obsessed with money that the loss of seventy-five thousand dollars to a fraudulent insurance agent, who had once been a trusted family ally, has become an endless source of guilt and

shame; and her second son, Davis, has been crippled by an ugly and painful divorce. Both Brother and Davis have led turbulent lives, but their younger brother Stanley (to whom the title of the play refers) has suffered an even greater tragedy. His loveless marriage to Bertie Dee Graham destroyed his life, turning him into a hopeless alcoholic. Stanley and Bertie Dee, once a seemingly perfect couple, married when they were eighteen out of a sense of duty to their fathers, who had arranged the union when their children were only nine. Mrs. Campbell recalls that their wedding was "a happy day for all of us," but Stanley remembers the event as fraught with problems: "We were married in the Baptist Church to please Bertie Dee's father. The church was packed. She was crying like her heart would break. . . . We went to Galveston on our honeymoon and she met another couple on their honeymoon and she danced every dance with him . . . holding him real close the way she liked to dance with everybody but me . . . I have been cheated. Married at eighteen and cheated" (Selected One-Act Play of Horton Foote 286-287). Now, Stanley's resentment and his repeated complaints that he has been "cheated" out of his youth have ruined his relationship with Bertie Dee as well as his reputation in Harrison. The couple's attempt to live out their father's fantasy has failed; and they have grown up to become angry and confused adults. Night after night Stanley gets drunk, makes threatening phone calls to

his brother-in-law Wesley Cox, whom he suspects of having an affair with his wife, and then senselessly climbs the pecan trees on the Courthouse Square. His antics are borne patiently by Mrs. Campbell, but Bertie Dee has had enough of Stanley's accusations and drunkenness. After taking all the abuse she can from Stanley, Bertie Dee locks her husband out of the house and forbids him to see their son. Bertie Dee's actions signal the inevitable doom of the marriage: "I'm talked out. Worn out. Beat!" (281). For Stanley, the breakup of his marriage results in the loss of his sanity. Neither Bertie Dee's threats or Mrs. Campbell's desperate pleas not to "look back" or "if you do think only of the pleasant things" can save the young man from destruction (280). When the curtain closes, Stanley (much like Myrtle Bledsoe) has retreated from reality into a world of infantile illusions where he clings to his mother in fear that he will "fall out of the trees one night" and kill himself. "When I was a boy I climbed the water tower once," he cries, "I could see everything for miles. The river, the courthouse, the gin, the pumping plant, the houses in town, the farms . . . Help me, Mama . . . or someday I'm gonna fall and kill myself. (He sings:) 'In the gloamin', Oh, my darlin' . . . (A pause.) Am I falling now, Mama?" (289). In the end, The Man Who Climbed Pecan Trees reflects the defeat, disillusionment, and terror of people who are

victims of great social changes over which they have no control.

Foote's next play, The Road to the Graveyard, originally produced by the Ensemble Theatre in New York in May 1985, captures the anguish and pain of an ordinary family facing the disintegration of their way of life during the Great Depression. Foote has stated that he originally wrote The Road to the Graveyard in 1955, and one can see similarities between this play and many of the writer's earlier pieces, such as Only the Heart, The Tears of My Sister, and The Midnight Caller. Once again the playwright shows us a family in transition, caught at the brink of its collapse. Characters are searching for a sense of identity, trying to escape the indignity of a repressive family environment. The play opens in the home of the Hall family in 1939, shortly before the onset of World War II. Here India Hall, a fifty-year-old spinster, cares for her aging parents and prays that her middle-aged brother Sonny will seize the opportunity to open his own movie theatre, an act which would provide a future for both of them. But Sonny, fearing to strike out on his own, is torn between a sense of family duty and his desire to marry Bertie Dee Landry, a woman who has been deemed unsuitable by his parents because of her Cajun ancestry. For years, Sonny has been unable to choose between his own dreams and those of his family, and India has been trapped by her unceasing devotion to others.

Horton Foote's plays often depict the destructive consequences of dysfunctional family units. Characters are trapped by a sense of duty to family, an inability to cope with financial difficulties, and a refusal or inability to confront the problems in their relationships. Perhaps none of Foote's plays offers a more revealing picture of the emotional dislocation caused by an unhealthy attachment to family than does The Road to the Graveyard. India Hall has always placed the needs of her family above her own. Brought up to care for others, she never married or learned a trade because she was too busy helping pay for the education of her older brother Thurman and cooking for her aging, senile parents. The grimness of India's plight is best expressed by her lifelong friend and fellow spinster, Lyda Darst, who asks: "What is wrong with you all? Why didn't you drive us out of the house and make us learn something to support ourselves by? Who's gonna take care of us when they're gone? Nobody . . . (Selected One-Act Plays of Horton Foote 438). Consequently, when the curtain falls, nothing has changed in the Hall household. Mr. and Mrs. Hall are locked within a world of confusing senility; Sonny continues to work as a lowly usher at the local movie theatre (and to suffer from sick headaches and upset stomachs); and India remains imprisoned in her own home where each day she watches the hearse go by on its way to

the graveyard and mourns her unrequited chances for happiness.

Like The Man Who Climbed the Pecan Trees, The Road to the Graveyard portrays a family struggling with its dreams and the bitter reality of poverty during the Great Depression. New York Times critic Frank Rich describes the mood created by both these plays: "The only peace in this play is indeed the discordant peace of the graveyard. A family is dying, and so is a social order soon to be upended by World War Two. In roughly a half-hour, [Foote] surveys the tragic ruins of a household--even as he looks back, with more anger than nostalgia, at a world whose idyllic glow belies all manner of unacknowledged neuroses and sexual and economic injustices" (11).

In The Prisoner's Song, first produced by the HB Playwrights Foundation in July 1985, Foote shifts his focus from the private world of the family to the larger community of Harrison. An array of small town people are trying to survive in a world that has been transformed by money, greed, and professional success. The central characters of the story are no longer people with roots, with a fixed definition of home. Instead, a homeless couple, John and Mae Murray, search for a place to put down roots and begin a new life. The play opens in 1927 in the Murray's one-room apartment, where John busily prepares for a business appointment that he hopes will bring him a steady job. John

has been out of work for some time, but clearly he is an energetic and thoughtful young man who deeply loves his wife and who sincerely wants to be a successful businessman. His wife Mae explains that John has overcome a number of personal tragedies to arrive at this place in his life.

She proudly announces that her husband (a recovering alcoholic) has not had a drink in eight months, hopeful that their future together will be much brighter than their past. But she is unaware of the full extent to which John has been handicapped by his previous failures. Outwardly, John appears to be a strong and resilient man, but beneath his optimistic cover, he remains haunted by his own fears and weaknesses. John has only fifteen dollars left in his savings with which to buy groceries and pay the rent. Yet, he insists that May not "worry [her] pretty head about such matters" (395) since someday he will be a "millionaire" with his "own oil wells" (398). John's fantasy conceals his concern that he will never be able to find work in Harrison.

As outsiders, the Murrays are unaware of the evil effects that oil has had upon the community of Harrison. In Mae's hometown of Livingston, people are still "waiting there every year to see what the cotton crop is going to do"; but here they "sit up nights thinking of ways to spend [their] money in order to outdo each other" (396). Mrs. Estill, the Murray's landlady, explains that Harrison has been corrupted by greed. "When oil was discovered, and the

people working for the oil companies moved in, everyone went a little crazy," she remembers (400).

To make matters worse, the town has lost the spirit of friendship and solidarity it once possessed; Southerners despise Yankees, neighbors manipulate other neighbors, and the wealthy take advantage of the poor.

The only person in town to show concern for John and Mae's dilemma is Luther Wright, an aristocratic friend of Mae's father who tries to be helpful but who ultimately uses his wealth and power to manipulate the couple. Luther has never recovered from the death of his only daughter, Mary Martha; and during the play, he asks John and Mae to accompany him to the cemetery. Ever hopeful that Luther will return their kindness by finding John work, Mae even sings "The Prisoner's Song" over his daughter's grave while being stung by red ants because as Luther explains, the song "was Mary Martha's favorite" (407). John and Mae serve as Luther's kind and thoughtful companions but, their generosity goes unrewarded. When the curtain falls Luther remains trapped in a world of selfish grief and John and Mae Murray are left questioning their future in Harrison.

The Prisoner's Song, one of Horton Foote's most impressive one-act plays, shows Harrison evolving from a traditional, orderly community to a chaotic and artificial place where the customs of the past are no longer practiced or revered. Harrison has become a town where poverty exists

amid wealth, where honesty and compassion hold little value, and where individuals feel alienated and disconnected from their society. The play suggests that neither money nor power can substitute for true peace and contentment, a theme Foote has frequently explored in his works.

In The One-Armed Man (1985) Foote creates his most pessimistic tale of community disintegration and human injustice. Set in Harrison in the 1920s, the play depicts a society in the selfish pursuit of money and success. The plot centers around a twenty-one-year-old laborer, Ned McHenry, who was fired from his job at a local cotton gin after tragically losing his left arm in a mechanical accident. Ned's handicap has prevented him from finding other work in town, and for months, he has been living in abject poverty. When the story begins, he has returned to the cotton gin to request that his former employer, C.W. Rowe, give him back his job so that he might regain his dignity and get on with his life. Rowe, fully aware of McHenry's predicament, is too concerned with the declining prices of cotton and with his dreams of "oil wells" to show any compassion for the young man (Selected One-Act Plays 419). He hopes that McHenry will accept his token of five dollars, as he has done before, and leave him in peace. But McHenry, having been driven to madness and rage, lashes out against his former boss. He pulls a gun on Rowe and forces him to repeat the Lord's Prayer again and again, while

demanding that he "give [him] back his arm" (424). Rowe realizes that McHenry has lost all touch with reality. He begs for mercy and tries to explain the reasons why he cannot hire a one-armed man. But at the very moment he thinks McHenry might spare his life, the young man fires and kills him. As the curtain falls, McHenry turns the gun on Rowe's assistant, Pinkey Anderson, who has suddenly appeared to inspect the situation; any further action is left to the imagination of the audience. Both McHenry and Rowe are victims of a society that has become so mechanized that human beings are secondary to power and money. As Gerald Wood points out, "McHenry and C.W. Rowe are not just employer and employee, owner and victim; they are carriers of the same disease" (Wood 416).

The One-Armed Man, like The Prisoner's Song, reveals Horton Foote's compassion for those wrecked by economic upheaval and human injustice. Both plays show a new order rising in the South; but in The One-Armed Man, Foote illustrates the poverty and emotional distress associated with the South's new social order. The play ends with the haunting picture of three men who have been destroyed by the evils of social change.

Horton Foote's trilogy of one-acts, The Roads to Home, expresses a similar view. The work dramatizes the pain of not belonging, of having no personal attachment to a person or place. First presented in March 1982 by the Manhattan

Punch Line Theatre, The Roads to Home (set during the 1920s) tells the story of three women, all refugees of small towns, who are trying to get back home. "They don't do that consciously," Foote explains, "but they constantly find ways to refer to or think about the place that they came from" (qtd. in Bilowit 5). The first of the three plays, A Nightingale, set in Houston, centers around Annie Gayle Long, a young housewife and mother of two, who has gone insane after the birth of her second child. Lately, Annie has begun dressing in her summer clothes, riding the streetcars at all hours of the day or night, and turning up without notice at the home of Mable Votaugh, a childhood acquaintance from Harrison. They nod politely and pretend nothing is wrong when Annie, for no apparent reason, begins to sing "My Old Kentucky Home" or when she forms her hand into a miniature pistol and whispers "pow, pow, pow" as though she were shooting the top off a flower. Annie's eccentricities make her friends uncomfortable, but Mable and Vonnie seem more concerned with the young woman's haunting memories of old scandals and personal tragedies in Harrison. Mable remembers Harrison as a wonderful community, but Annie remembers it as a brutal and unforgiving place where she first encountered the horrors of human injustice and cruelty. Annie's parents moved to Harrison from Rhode Island when she was a child; but as she recalls, her mother "never did care" for the town (Selected One-Act Plays 300).

She hated the excessive rain, the poor medical care, the saloons, and the ostracism her family received from neighbors. Annie's father made a good deal of money in Harrison, eventually becoming president of the bank, but his wealth could not protect his family from an array of tragedies and misfortunes. The Gayles lost four children to sickness shortly after moving to Texas, and sometime later, Mr. Gayle was gunned down on the main street of Harrison by his best friend, Mr. Sledge. Annie Gayle never forgot the incident or the sounds of Miss Rosa Gilbert praying over the body of her dead father. She tried to carry on with her life by attending college, by marrying Mr. Long, and by raising two children. Yet no matter how hard she tried, she could not escape her past. Now, trapped in a world of grief and despair, all she asks from anyone is "tenderness and mercy" (312). But Mable and Vonnie do not know how to empathize with her anguish and fear. They attempt to teach Annie the Lord's Prayer rather than minister to her real needs, and then they pity her for not knowing the prayer. When Mr. Long finally appears to escort his wife home, it is clear that nobody can prevent Annie from retreating further away from reality. Mr. Long feels incapable of giving her the kind of care she desperately needs; afraid that he will lose his job, or perhaps his own sanity, he decides to admit her to the state mental institution in Austin where she will at least receive some attention. When the play ends, Annie,

confused and bewildered, cannot understand her husband's decision nor the extent to which her life is about to change.

A Nightingale shows the broken life of Annie Gayle Long as part of the general breakdown of community in both Harrison and Houston; The Dearest of Friends, assumes a narrower focus. In this play, Foote explores the intimate world of Eddie and Vonnie Votaugh and their futile attempts to respond to their failing marriage. The play opens a few months after Annie has been committed to the asylum in Austin. Vonnie has just learned that her husband Eddie is having an affair with another woman, Rachel Gibson, whom he met on a recent train ride to Harrison. Eddie believes that he really loves Rachel, and he has asked his wife for a divorce. Vonnie refuses, and outraged by Eddie's infidelity, she has run next door to her dearest friend Mabel for consolation. When she finally confesses her situation, Mabel seems more concerned with the petty details of Vonnie's trip to Harrison than with her feelings of rejection and humiliation. Confused about what action she should take, Vonnie considers phoning the other woman and standing up to her husband. But deep down she knows that she can do nothing, except pray. When Eddie finally enters to speak to her, she exhibits utter confusion. Eddie tries his best to understand his passion for Rachel Gibson: "I'm very confused," he cries. "I've tried to live right all my

life, to be good and do the right thing" (343). The play concludes with no answer to Vonnie's prayers, no assurance that Eddie will stand by his wife, and no guarantee that their marriage can be salvaged. The only certainty is the pain and regret of two people who have allowed their love for one another to die.

In Spring Dance, Foote concludes the tragic saga of Annie Gayle Long. Set in 1928 in the state mental institution in Austin where Annie has been confined for four years, the play opens with the asylum's annual spring dance. Annie could easily be the belle of the ball, but she is having difficulty remembering her past. She cannot, as she says, keep everything "straight and clear" (Selected One-Act Plays 354). She remembers that she is married, or once was, and that her husband would be understandably upset if she were to dance with another man. She politely declines the invitations of her young suitors and takes refuge in her memories of "chinaberry blossoms" and better times gone by (347). The reality of Annie's situation is that Mr. Long has long ago divorced her and placed her children in the care of her mother, Mrs. Gayle. Annie's family has totally abandoned her, and nobody has visited or written her in more than a year. When the play ends, she knows that she will probably never see her children again and that she will spend the remainder of her life in the sanitorium; but rather than dwell upon such thoughts, she retreats into her

own private fantasy world where grief and loneliness can no longer touch her.

Annie Gayle Long's disturbing journey has led her to a home where she finally feels secure and at peace. The same cannot be said of Mabel Votaugh and Vonnie Hayhurst. Their homes are nothing more than domestic prisons where they must continue to do battle against the maddening forces of boredom and neglect. Mabel and Vonnie, imprisoned by their loneliness, are two forsaken souls searching for tenderness and mercy in a world they neither cherish nor fully understand.

In The Roads to Home, Horton Foote again expresses his belief that a sense of belonging is essential to human happiness and personal fulfillment. To Foote, a home is much more than a mere building or "something you own" (Valentine's Day 80). It is a state of mind which connects us with others, holds the key to our identities, and offers an emotional refuge in times of trouble and distress. Like all of the works discussed in this chapter, The Roads to Home shows Horton Foote's sympathy for society's unfortunates. The plays dramatize the longings and frustrations of people who find themselves trapped in a strange and alien environment. Characters such as John Murray, India Hall, and Stanley Campbell search for personal contentment and economic freedom in Harrison but find a community bereft of friendship, charity, and human

compassion. A sense of loneliness pervades all these plays, and insensitivity and greed deny freedom and happiness to those who are different in creed and temperament. "I try to look at the past with an objective eye," Foote has said. "No time is really wonderful, so I'm not nostalgic about the past. You know, life does defeat a lot of people, and you've got to face that reality. I have great compassion for those who can't survive life. My heart has been broken many times by people I loved who couldn't find a way. I don't know why some people are not able to carry on but I do know that a lot of people take it with a certain grace and stand up to enormous obstacles" (Foote interview, 18 Nov. 1988).

In his most recently produced one-acts, Blind Date (1985) and The Land of the Astronauts (1988), Foote celebrates the capacity of human beings to stand up to the indignities of the human experience. Blind Date, set in Harrison, Texas, in 1928, was presented by the Ensemble Theatre in 1985, as part of its one-act play marathon. Blind Date shares many similarities with The Dancers, which Foote wrote in 1954. Here again, two teenagers are thrown together against their wills by a domineering elder who wants to control their lives. And as before, Foote suggests that when young people are allowed to follow their true feelings and instincts, they will usually discover their own sense of peace and contentment. The play takes place in the

living room of Robert and Dolores Henry. Dolores, once an admired high school beauty queen but now the scourge of her husband, has finally been able to arrange a date for her ill-mannered niece, Sarah Nancy, with Felix Robertson, a "sensitive boy" from a "lovely family" (Selected One-Act Plays 369). Dolores knows that Sarah Nancy is a blunt and sarcastic child who has never had a successful relationship with a boy, but she desperately wants to improve her niece's record with men and to tame her irascible disposition. Dolores tries to teach Sarah Nancy the proper way to conduct herself on a date and attempts to refashion the girl in her own image. She even goes so far as to create a ridiculous list of topics for her to talk about with her new beau. But when Felix, a would-be mortician, finally arrives at the Henry home, Sarah Nancy makes it abundantly clear that she has no intention of assuming her aunt's flirtatious manner. Instead of being nice to her suitor she treats him like an old shoe and admits that she considers him a boring stupid lout. Sarah Nancy's attitude delights her uncle Robert, who believes it is much better to be "honest than gracious," as much as it distresses her aunt Dolores, who retires for the evening with a sick headache (387). Felix also retreats from the field but soon returns to apologize for his inconsiderate behavior. Finally left alone by their nosy elders, Felix and Sarah Nancy are able to admit to one another that they are not very good conversationalists but

that they do care for each other. When the play ends, they have established a common bond of honesty between them as they contentedly and wordlessly pore over a stack of Dolores' old high school yearbooks.

The last of Foote's one-act plays to be discussed in this chapter, The Land of the Astronauts, was originally produced by the Ensemble Studio Theatre of New York in May 1988. Set in 1983, the play speaks of the loss of intimacy within families, the celebrity worship of the 1980s, and the trivialization of many of the basic emotional experiences essential to human happiness. More importantly, The Land of the Astronauts offers yet another tribute to the remarkable capacity of human beings to survive personal calamities and misfortunes. Set in the spring of 1983, the story begins in the office of Harrison's sheriff, where Lorena Massey is searching for her husband Phil, who had left home several months before to look for work in Houston. Phil had promised his wife and his daughter, Mabel Sue, that as soon as he found a job in the city, he would send for them; but Lorena has not seen or heard from him for more than a week. She fears that something terrible has happened. Lorena's situation, that of a young mother abandoned by a wandering husband, is similar to Georgette Thomas' in The Traveling Lady.

Soon after their marriage, the Massey's moved to Harrison. Phil began working in his brother Rusty's

restaurant, and Lorena took a job as an attendant at the Colonial Inn. For a time, the family lived comfortably but Phil soon grew tired of working in a restaurant. He had always dreamed of becoming an astronaut; and consequently he enrolled in college where he hoped to receive the kind of education that would enable him to get a job with NASA. In reality, Phil knew that space travel was "foolish" but he hoped that someday he would get the chance to "go up into space and leave this earth and all its troubles and frustrations behind" (493). However, in reality, Phil is unable to find work, and he wanders the streets of Houston in a state of insanity, hopelessly searching for the Space Center, and admitting to the world that he is an "astronaut that [has] lost his way" (487).

The Murrays are not the only family in The Land of the Astronauts who experience the pain and frustrations of economic turmoil and emotional dislocation. They are joined in their misfortunes by the Taylors, who own and manage the Colonial Inn. Like the Murrays, the Taylors live in economic uncertainty, where day after day they must work without hope for a better future.

When the play concludes Lorena finds Phil still frantically searching for his astronaut paradise. Although heartbroken and discouraged, Phil does finally accept Lorena's advice to "swallow [his] pride" and return to his job at Rusty's restaurant (497). The young man will never

realize his dream to be an astronaut but facing his circumstances realistically equips him to deal more effectively with the rest of his life.

The Land of the Astronauts is unique to Foote's work in that it treats the social and economic changes of its characters without dramatizing class or race struggles. It portrays ordinary people trying to cope with the pressures of a world that values individuals less than it does materialism. The Land of the Astronauts paints a portrait of family love as it confronts life's obstacles.

In addition to the one-act plays discussed in this chapter, Foote has written three full length dramas recently produced on stage: Dividing The Estate (first produced in 1989 at Princeton University's McCarter Theatre), Talking Pictures (which premiered in 1990 at the Osolo Theatre in Sarasota, Florida), and The Habitation of Dragons (first performed in 1988 at the Pittsburg Public Theatre and later filmed for Turner Network Television's "Screenworks" in 1992). Each of these plays continues Foote's exploration of the lives of small town Texas families. Dividing The Estate, set in 1987, looks at a once proud and prosperous Southern family facing poverty and ruin. The story depicts the struggles among three generations of Gordon children as they gather in Harrison to say goodbye to their dying matriarch, Stella, and to divide the immense land holdings they have inherited from their parents. The children,

driven by self-interest and greed, argue for their fair share of the estate in hopes that the money from the sale of the land will provide them with a fresh start in life. As the play unfolds, family members bicker over how the property should be partitioned and who should assume control of the estate. The family stands on the brink of financial ruin; but in the end, the forces which divide the characters serve to join them together. The Gordons discover that their land is of little value on the current real estate market and that the only way they can protect their inheritance against taxes and court costs is to hold on to the property and to reclaim Harrison as their home. The Gordons learn the inevitability of social and economic change. As Bob admits, Harrison and Houston are "dying on the vine" (41). By 1987, it is no longer "profitable to grow cotton" in Harrison, the "chemical plants are poisoning the environment" on the Gulf Coast, and "Mexicans are coming in droves from Mexico" (7). What finally keeps the Gordons from suffering the pain and humiliation that others have experienced in present day America is the solidarity of their family.

Family survival, at the heart of Dividing The Estate, is also at the center of Foote's comedy, Talking Pictures (1990). The playwright explains that the inspiration behind this play came from thinking about the day when talking pictures were first introduced in Wharton, and about the

mysterious disappearance of the lady who had played piano for the silent films. "She and her son lived across the street from me and I never knew what happened to her," Foote recalls. "She just appeared one day and then, when talkies came, she disappeared. I knew that piano-playing lady and her son, and many years later I wrote a play based on my memory of her" (Foote interview, 24 March 1989). Talking Pictures is unique to Foote's cannon in that it treats farcically the social and economic changes which threaten family relationships. It is a funny but troubling play about the ease with which human relationships can erode in an escapist society. Foote uses the most theatrical image of the 1920s--the infant talkies--to comment on the loss of personal values and integrity in a world which has been transformed by affluency and technological expansion. In the play, the older agrarian customs of Harrison are giving way to a new industrial order which features the speed of the automobile, the convenience of the telephone, and the appealing sights and sounds of motion pictures, all potent forces in the everyday lives of Harrison's citizens. As the town struggles to retain its economic and cultural identity in the midst of this change, both young and old characters seek stability in their personal lives.

Set in the spring of 1927, Foote's story tells of Myra, a "grass widow" or divorcee, who rents a small room for herself and her fourteen-year-old son, Pete, from the

economically troubled Jackson family. Myra pays her rent from her salary as pianist for Harrison's movie house, which is about to go talkie. She knows that hers is a dead profession, and she worries that when the transition from silent to talking pictures occurs she will no longer be able to support herself and her child. Myra is even more upset by Pete's desire to move to Houston to live with his father, Gerard Anderson. Gerard, a financially secure but egotistical man, has obviously poisoned Pete's mind with promises of excitement and wealth, and the boy has decided that he no longer wants to live with his mother. Before the play ends, Pete must make peace with his mother, face up to his father's limitations, and come to accept Myra's marriage to another man.

Most of the relationships in Talking Pictures are superficial and trivial, hardly more substantial than the flashy images projected on Harrison's movie screen. The only relationship which exhibits honesty and compassion is that of Myra, Willis, and Pete; but their love for one another is threatened by jealously and deceit. Willis, a sincere and hard-working man, is devoted to Myra and Pete but he cannot ask for Myra's hand in marriage because he has not yet divorced his first wife, Gladys. Willis is hopeful that with his "steady work and raise in pay" he can finally save enough money to pay for a divorce and marry Myra. But

he soon discovers that his wife has no intention of granting his wishes.

Willis' dream of marrying Myra is also threatened by the appearance of her ex-husband, Gerard Anderson, who arrives in Harrison to take custody of Pete. Gerard's belief in the supreme importance of money and in his own strength as a husband and father are both destroyed when his wife Jackie Kate asks him for a divorce. Gerard must finally admit that the relationship shared by Willis, Myra, and Pete--despite their lack of money and prestige--is far superior to his own shallow relationships. In the final analysis, Talking Pictures, much like Dividing the Estate, is a tale about the need for genuine and lasting values in a changing world.

Horton Foote's most ambitious work in recent years has been The Habitation of Dragons, which opened on September 28, 1988, at the Pittsburg Public Theatre under the direction of the playwright. Originally written in 1964, The Habitation of Dragons (loosely based on family legend) tells the story of a Southern family that copes with a series of tragedies during the Great Depression. Set in 1935, the plot centers around two brothers, George and Leonard Tolliver, who are in conflict over the former's desire to sell his share of the family farm to finance a run for county attorney. Leonard has become a noted lawyer, and his younger brother George has given him the opportunity for

his success by waiting to go to law school until Leonard had finished his degree and set up practice in Harrison. Over the years, that sacrifice has become a wedge between the two men, and their growing animosity has forced their mother, Lenora, into the role of peacemaker. The brothers' estrangement has been reinforced by Leonard's support of Billy Carter, his brother-in-law, in the race for county attorney and by his rigid control of the family estate following the mysterious death of his father. Mr. Tolliver died years earlier in what the family has chosen to call a "hunting accident;" but during the course of the play, we learn from Uncle Virgil, who arrives in Harrison penniless and alone, that the patriarch's death was in fact not an accident but instead a senseless suicide. This fact marks the beginning of the ruin of the family's image. As the antagonism between Leonard and George grows, Leonard's wife Margaret is discovered having an affair with Wally Smith, an amiable man who gives her more attention than her husband and is like an uncle to her two little boys, Leonard Jr. and Horace. One day, while swimming in the river with Wally, the children drown and Leonard learns the truth about his wife's infidelity. He blames Margaret for the horrible turn of events, which grows even more tragic when the enraged Billy Carter murders Wally. Devastated, Leonard tries to put Margaret and the past out of his mind, but he finds that

running away from problems cannot solve them. Only through forgiveness of others and self can he be healed.

The Habitation of Dragons, a complex work, both in character and structure, "is about forgiveness," Foote explains. "How difficult it is to forgive others and oneself. That's basically what the title says. You would think that the Habitation of Dragons is a dark, unholy place but out of all this chaos and darkness, reeds and rushes, life can continue" (Foote interview, 24 April 1989).

In many ways, The Habitation of Dragons holds a special place in Horton Foote's canon. The play's study of a family struggling against social change is one of Foote's most penetrating depictions of the ability of individuals to endure appalling personal experiences. Foote, in an interview printed in the program of the original stage production, stated:

> I am in awe of how Leonard Tolliver has taken what has happened to him. I'm not sure that I could respond that way. There is a point, as the play begins to find its own accumulative life, where something takes over. And you look at it and say, 'Well yes, I wrote this, and that is exactly how it went, but where did it all come from?' I have four children and I can't imagine anything worse than losing them. Especially, as in Habitation, when it is senseless tragedy. That I think is the hardest thing to make peace with. I'm in awe of the last part of the play. I think it is daring, very bold; and as far as modern literature is concerned, there are not many that would end this way; most of them would end with some punitive thing. I believe it; I don't know if I can accept any credit for it; I just woke up and there it was (qtd. in Zeller 24).

The Habitation of Dragons also proved to be a viable vehicle for television. On September 8, 1992, the play was presented as the second installment of the TNT Screenworks series, a marquee created for Ted Turner's cable network by Steven Spielberg's Amblin Entertainment and Michael Brandman Productions. Spielberg and Brandman's purpose for the series was to design a showcase that would bring America's most distinguished playwrights back to television; besides Foote, other writers included David Mamet and Arthur Miller. In a 1992 interview with Ann Hodges of the Houston Chronicle, Foote refers to producer Michael Brandman's invitation for him "to do something" for the program (qtd. in Hodges 1D). Foote was even more pleased when he learned that he would be involved in all facets of making the film. He helped with the casting, the editing, and the direction. More importantly, he served as the movie's location scout and was instrumental in making sure that The Habitation of Dragons was shot in Texas and not in a Hollywood studio. "We scouted everywhere," he explains. "They kept wanting to do it on the Disney Ranch in California, and we had just about given up. But then my wife and I went to Navasota one weekend, and on the way back, I said, 'Let's just look in Sealy.' We looked awhile and my wife said, 'I'm too tired, and there's nothing here. Let's go home.' But I turned the corner and suddenly, there was the house. It was perfect. Exactly the house we'd been looking for everywhere" (4D).

The authenticity of the Texas setting became an important factor in enhancing the film's credibility. Performed by an impressive cast that included Jean Stapleton, Frederic Forrest, Pat Hingle, Maureen O'Sullivan, Robert Blossom, Brad Davis, and Hallie Foote, The Habitation of Dragons proved to be even more effective on television than it had been in the theatre.

But there was a sad ending to the project. On August 5, 1992, only a month after the play aired on TNT, Lillian Foote died in Princeton, New Jersey, after a brief illness. A few days later, she was buried in Wharton, the town she had come to call home. Lillian's death was a devastating blow to Foote, who for almost fifty years had depended on her unwavering love and devotion. Lillian had not only been a steadfast wife to Horton, but also his most supportive and practical colleague. Over the years, she had produced several of her husband's plays and films, most notablably 1918, On Valentine's Day, Courtship, and The Roads to Home; and she had assisted him on virtually every play and screenplay he had written or directed. She had given Horton four children and had kept his dreams alive during the darker moments of his life and career. Lillian's death is still quite difficult for him to accept. "It's not easy," he sadly admits. "We were together for 48 years. I just wish it could have been 148" (qtd. in Hodges 4D).

Since Lillian's passing, Foote has directed an off-Broadway production of his play The Roads to Home, starring Jean Stapleton and his daughter Hallie. The play opened for a month's run at the Lamb's Little Theatre on September 28, 1992. David Richards of The New York Times commented: "Our loud violent times are not particularly hospitable to retiring creatures like these. We like crackups on the stage, car crashes on the screen and brash characters who will at least go down swinging. Mr. Foote's gentleness will be viewed by some as torpor. Admittedly, his roads to home are little byways--not even paved, I suspect, and doubtless no wider than a Model T. But they lead someplace humane and caring, where heartbreak doesn't have to be desperate and noisy to merit our concern" (5H). The Roads to Home gained less attention than Foote had hoped for; nevertheless, the production showed that his subtle family dramas still have a home on the American stage. The production also proved that Foote is not yet ready to retire from public life.

Despite career frustrations, personal misfortunes, and grief, Horton Foote continues to spend his days traveling the country, sharing his knowledge of the craft of writing, and creating new plays and screenplays. In the past few months of late 1992 and early 1993, he has given lectures at Texas A&M University and at the Salado Arts Festival in Salado, Texas. Also, he has begun rewriting a screenplay about Blues singer Bessie Smith that he originally wrote

some twenty years ago. Foote has plans to film the work with the financial backing of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Studios. Clearly, the career of Horton Foote the playwright is a career still in progress.

CONCLUSION

For more than half a century Horton Foote has been writing what he calls "personal plays," sensitive explorations of his familial Texas roots that emphasize the strength and resilience of the human spirit. He has written at least eighty works for the stage, television, and motion pictures, and he has been equally successful in all three mediums, a record unmatched by any other American writer.

Throughout his career, he has drawn inspiration from his memories of Wharton, Texas, and he has set almost all his plays in Harrison (the fictional equivalent of his hometown). Growing up in Wharton, Foote was fascinated at an early age by the people around him--how they lived and died, loved and lost, prevailed and endured. The dynamic inner rhythms and the deceptive outward appearance of decorum and calm in their lives made profound impressions on him. Today, some sixty years after he left Wharton to pursue a career in the theatre, his homeplace still inspires his writing. Wherever his career has taken him, Foote has remained faithful to his initial quest: by poetic means to depict the particular reality (and the universal meaningfulness) of a Southern community and its people.

For over half a century, Foote has remained true to his vision. He has never experimented in style or form, even during the aesthetic revolts of the 1960s and 1970s when writers such as Tennessee Williams and William Inge were

attempting to wrench their art (unsuccessfully) into new directions. "Even if I wanted to change the pattern of my writing, which I don't, I can't," Foote admits. "These are my people and my stories and the plays I want to write. Really the only ones that I know how to write" ("Learning to Write" 91). He explains further, "If you want to be a serious writer, you can't worry about fashions and changes of opinion. You have to stick with what you want to do, as much as you can. I mean, I've seen so much up and down, you know. I had known Tennessee Williams at one time, and I'd seen him go out of fashion, and it broke his heart. And I decided that you'd better somehow root yourself a little differently than that. It's a see-saw but if you're smart, if you're fortunate, you know what you want to do and keep at it" (qtd. in Daily 57).

Furthermore, no other American dramatist has produced a body of work that chronicles the developing history of America throughout the twentieth century. The settings for his many plays, screenplays, and teleplays range from the first decade of the new century to the present, covering regional and national natural disasters (the influenza epidemic of 1918), as well as the economic, social, and political conditions that altered lives for generations to come (World War I, the urban boom of the 1920s, the Great Depression, World War II, civil disorders in the post-war era). His hundreds of characters stand as witnesses to the

20th century, testifying to the brutality and beauty of life's experience.

Although Foote's works have received over the years positive assessments by respected critics and theatre practitioners, the playwright remained virtually unknown to the American public until he began writing plays for television. His celebrity, during the decade of the 1950s, was short lived. National recognition came again when Foote received an Academy Award for his screenplay of Harper Lee's novel, To Kill a Mockingbird (1962), and, again, twenty years later, for his original screenplay, Tender Mercies (1983). This achievement was followed two years later by the extraordinary successful filmed version of his play, The Trip to Bountiful (1985). However, despite widespread critical and public acclaim for his art, Foote (unlike Williams or Miller, for example) has never gained a secure place for his drama in the repertories of the nation's professional theatres. C.W.E. Bigsby, in his three volume study, A Critical Introduction to Twentieth-Century American Drama (1982-85), completely ignores the work of Foote, and indeed, does not even mention his name.

Why do producers, directors, and critics continue to neglect Foote's plays? I have raised the question without being able to answer it satisfactorily. Some would argue that the plays of Williams, Miller, and Shepard, for example, have epic elements usually not found in Foote's

dramatic world, and such plays permit adventuresome staging and imaginative scene and light designs. Certainly, over the past fifteen or twenty years, theatre practice has moved steadily toward a more highly visual expression, becoming more efficient, complex, and awesome as technology has progressed. Others would argue that Foote's plays unquestionably offer opportunities and challenges for similar approaches in staging and design. Andre Serban's anti-realistic, poetic staging and design for Chekhov's The Cherry Orchard demonstrated successfully that "realistic" dramatic action loses neither credibility nor emotional truth when liberated from the restrictions of a box set and the conservatism of conventional realism.

Horton Foote's plays will find their way into the repertories of American theatres. More and more theatre practitioners will discover and rediscover them and want to produce them. The cotton fields, the pecan trees, the front porch swing, the cemeteries, the dwindling towns, and the dusty roads--images of America throughout the century move poignantly through the plays. And the characters who stand as expressive witnesses, who struggle, fall, rise, and endure, are the nation's ancestors just as they are literally Foote's. They are our brothers, daughters, fathers, sons, mothers, aunts, uncles, grandparents and community at large. They speak to the mysteries of existence and to the power of poetry.

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Major Field: Theatre

Title of Dissertation: Voices from Home: Familial Bonds in the Works of Horton Foote (1916-)

Approved:

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EXAMINING COMMITTEE:

Date of Examination:

November 8, 1993